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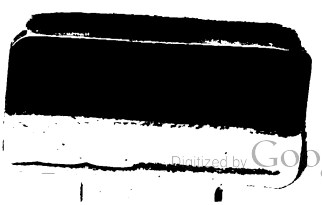
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# IS CONSCIENCE AN EMOTION?

Hastings Rashdall

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**Raymond F. West Memorial Lectures on Immortality, Human Conduct, and Human Destiny**

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WHY WE MAY BELIEVE IN LIFE AFTER DEATH. By Charles Edward Jefferson. 1911.

THREE LORDS OF DESTINY. By Samuel McChord Crothers. 1913.

IS CONSCIENCE AN EMOTION? By Hastings Rashdall. 1914.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

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# IS CONSCIENCE AN EMOTION?

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Raymond F. West Memorial Lectures

# IS CONSCIENCE AN EMOTION?

*Three Lectures on Recent Ethical Theories*

BY

HASTINGS RASHDALL

D.LITT., D.C.L., LL.D., FELLOW OF THE BRITISH ACADEMY
FELLOW AND LECTURER OF NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD
CANON RESIDENTIARY OF HEREFORD



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# PREFATORY NOTE

THIS volume represents the third of the series of Raymond F. West Memorial Lectures at the Leland Stanford Junior University. These lectures were delivered on October 8, 9, and 10, 1913, by Dr. Hastings Rashdall, Fellow and Lecturer of New College, Oxford, England. The conditions of the lectureship are set forth in the following letter from its founders:

In memory of our beloved son, Raymond Frederic West, a student in Leland Stanford Junior University, who was drowned in Eel River, in California, on January 18, 1906, before the completion of his college course, we wish to present to the trustees and authorities of the Leland Stanford Junior University, at Palo Alto, California, the honored Alma Mater of our son, the sum of ten thousand dollars ($10,000), to be held as a fund in perpetual trust, for the establishment of a lectureship on



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a plan similar to the Dudleian Lectures and the Ingersoll Lectures at Harvard University.

By this plan, in each collegiate year, or on each alternate year, at the discretion of the Board of Trustees, from one to three lectures shall be given on some phase of this subject: "Immortality, Human Conduct, and Human Destiny."

Such lectures shall not form part of the usual college or university course, nor shall they be delivered by any professor or instructor in active service in the institution. Such lecturer may be a clergyman or a layman, a member of any ecclesiastical organization, or of none, but he should be a man of the highest personal character and of superior intellectual endowment. He shall be chosen by the faculty and the Board of Trustees of said University in such manner as the said Board of Trustees may determine, but the appointment in any case shall be made at least six months before the delivery of said lecture.

The above sum is to be safely invested, and the interest thereof is to be divided, at the discretion of the Board of Trustees, into two parts,



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## PREFATORY NOTE

the one an honorarium to the lecturer, the other for the publication of the said lectures, or the gratuitous distribution of a number of copies of the same if published by the author.

The manuscript of the course of lectures shall become the property of the University, and shall be published by the University unless some other form of publication is more acceptable.

The course of lectures shall be known as the "Raymond F. West Memorial Lectures on Immortality, Human Conduct, and Human Destiny."

F. W. WEST.
MARY B. WEST.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON,
*January 18, 1910.*

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# AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THESE lectures were delivered as the West Lectures in the Leland Stanford Junior University, California, in October, 1913.

When I published my book on *The Theory of Good and Evil* (1907), the first volume of Professor Westermarck's *Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* had only just appeared — too late for me to undertake any serious criticism upon it, while Dr. McDougall's *Social Psychology* was not published until a year later. I was, therefore, obliged to confine my attention to earlier forms of naturalistic and emotionalistic ethics. The present lectures give me the opportunity of attempting some reply to the position taken up by these writers. It was, however, hardly possible to make such a reply intelligible to students not well acquainted with the subject, or to explain my own views to more advanced students of philosophy who had not



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read my book, without to some extent going over ground which I had already traversed in that work. Lecture I, therefore, is devoted to a brief and rather popular discussion of the general question whether our moral judgements are to be considered the work of Reason, and therefore to possess objective validity, or whether they can ultimately be analysed into a kind of feeling or emotion or "Moral Sense." The second lecture deals with the arguments in favor of the latter view, which Professor Westermarck and Dr. McDougall base upon the anthropological facts connected with the origin and early history of morality — and which have been considered in some quarters as introducing a new epoch in the history of Ethics, the first, indeed, according to some, which can be described as scientific at all. In Lecture III I have tried to clear up and illustrate what is meant by asserting a definite, intellectual, *sui generis* concept of "good" or "value," to show the relation in which such judgements of value stand to our desires and emotions, and to meet the attempt made by the



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late Professor James and many others to identify the concept of "good" with mere "satisfaction" or "satisfactoriness."

My appointment to the West Lectureship, one of the conditions of which is that the lectures should be published by the University, may, I hope, be a sufficient apology for the inadequacy of the treatment which was inevitable in so short a course.

H. RASHDALL.

OXFORD, *July*, *1914*.

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# IS CONSCIENCE AN EMOTION?

## I

### MORAL REASON OR MORAL SENSE?

We are all of us conscious of approving some kinds of conduct and condemning others. We all of us attribute some distinctive meaning to the terms "right" and "wrong." In the present lecture I shall venture to assume that much — and something more. I shall not occupy your time with examining the attempts which have at various times been made to analyse away altogether these terms — to twist the term "right" into meaning merely "conducive to my



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own pleasure," or to explain away the idea of moral obligation into an artificial invention of crafty kings and priests devised for their own benefit, appealing merely to the fears or to the vanity of mankind, and being at bottom, as the old cynic Mandeville expressed it, nothing but the "political progeny of prejudice begot on pride." Such attempts are now abandoned by serious and scientific writers. I shall assume in fact the reality of what we popularly call "Conscience," considered simply as a psychological phenomenon, as a distinct element in the psychical endowment of the normal human being. The question which I propose to discuss is the nature of this phenomenon — the question, What is the real character and meaning of the mental act which takes place



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in our minds when we call this act right, that one wrong?

Almost all through the history of moral philosophy there have been two explanations of this mental act. There have been those who treat moral approbation as essentially an act of judgement, as the work of Reason, as coming from the intellectual side of our mental nature; and there have been those who regard it as simply a particular sort of feeling or emotion or a complex of emotions, the share of the intellect in the moral life being reduced to that of registering the occurrence of the feeling. There have been those who treat our ultimate moral judgements as self-evident intellectual propositions, like "two straight lines cannot enclose a space," or 2 + 2 = 4, or "A cannot be both A



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and not A at the same time," or "a syllogism with an undistributed middle in it is invalid." And on the other hand, there have been those who treat moral approbation as an emotion immediately and spontaneously excited by the contemplation of certain conduct, just as we immediately experience a sensation of green on looking at the grass, or an emotion of pity at seeing another human being suffer torture. At first sight the question will probably seem to those who are unfamiliar with such inquiries a rather barren and uninteresting one — at all events, as a technical question of no great practical significance. So long as we know the difference between right and wrong, they may think, what does it matter by what sort of faculty we know it? So long as we have a Con-



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science, what does it matter whether we call it "Reason" or a "Moral Sense"? "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." I hope I shall be able to show you, before I have done, that in the whole range of philosophy there is hardly another inquiry of such momentous import — whether we look to its bearing upon our general speculative view of the universe or to its practical consequences for the well-being of human society.

In the earlier history of philosophy constructive views of ethics were always associated with the rationalistic view of the moral consciousness. All the earlier champions of morality against sceptical assaults — men like Plato and the Stoics in ancient times, men like Cudworth and Cumberland and Clarke



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in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries — were agreed that moral distinctions were the work of Reason: the only writers who attempted to deny the existence of distinct intellectual concepts of good and evil were men like the ancient Epicureans, or Thomas Hobbes and his followers, who reduced the ideas of good and evil to pleasant and painful.

According to this view Reason had nothing whatever to do with conduct beyond merely determining the means by which our desires could be gratified. And the Reason that does this is, of course, no distinctive moral Reason, but simply the ordinary Understanding by which we generalize from experience. Such thinkers did not admit the existence of any distinctively *moral* feeling



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or emotion distinguishable from the mere feeling of pleasure and pain. The first school which asserted that there is such a distinctively ethical feeling was what is generally known as the "Moral Sense" school, of which the third Lord Shaftesbury, the famous author of the "Characteristicks," and the Ulster philosopher, Francis Hutcheson, are the classical exponents.

In its origin this school represents a reaction against the philosophy of John Locke. The philosophy of Locke was really just as empirical, just as hedonistic, as that of Hobbes — though from a practical point of view Locke was quite "on the side of the Angels." Locke continued to use the language of the rationalistic school, but the spirit of it was gone. He talked a great deal



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about morals being a matter of demonstration, the work of Reason, and so on; but in reality he assigned to Reason no function other than that of calculating what course of action was likely to produce most pleasure, and what to produce most pain. At bottom all that Locke meant by moral truths being matter of demonstration was that it could be demonstrated that people would go to hell if they were not moral. He believed that the morality of an act could be demonstrated just because he did not believe in any ultimate, intrinsic distinction between right and wrong. The true ground of morality, according to him, was "the will and law of a God, who sees men in the dark, has in his hands rewards and punishments, and power enough to call



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to account the proudest offender."[1] Historically the theory of a "moral sense" was a protest — a very valuable protest in its way — against this system of theological hedonism. To compare morality to mathematics now seemed to have ended in making morality a mere matter of calculation in the commercial sense of the word: to compare moral distinctions to mathematical axioms seemed to be turning morality into a mere arithmetic of self-interest. There arose a cry that morality was a matter of heart, not of the head. And this cry found expression in what is known as the "Moral Sense" school.

Starting from Locke's belief that all our knowledge came to us ultimately from "ideas," by which was practically

[1] *Essay*, book II, chap. 3, § 6.



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meant "sensations" or "feelings," these writers sought to place morality upon an unassailable foundation by treating moral approbation as a distinct kind of idea or feeling — a "reflex idea" (as they called it), which entered into our minds when we reflected — turned our thoughts back — upon our own thinking and our own acting. On contemplating an act of cruelty, or, rather, on contemplating the motive which inspired such an action, we immediately and spontaneously experience another idea — an "idea of disapprobation": in contemplating the passion of benevolence in our own breasts, or an action suggestive of such a passion in another, we experience a distinct idea or feeling of approbation. There was no attempt to resolve this idea into a mere pleasure



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on a level with any other pleasure. The distinctive — indeed, the authoritative — character of this feeling was strongly insisted on. It was supposed to be given us by a distinct kind of sense — which they called the "moral sense." The ideas of this sense were absolutely *sui generis* — as distinct from any other feelings of our nature as seeing is different from hearing or the emotion of pity from that of anger. These men had no suspicion that there was anything destructive or subversive in their teaching. Shaftesbury was, indeed, attacked by the orthodox of his day as a Deist, but he was not irreligious; and his main object in writing about Ethics was to defend the disinterestedness of the moral motive against those who based moral obligation solely upon the fear of hell



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and the hope of heaven.[1] Francis Hutcheson was an earnest Presbyterian minister — liberal, according to the standard of his time, but sincerely theistic and Christian. I cannot resist the temptation of illustrating his theological attitude by quoting the criticism pronounced by an elder of his father's church upon his first sermon. The father, himself also a Presbyterian minister, had been preaching elsewhere. On his return to his own manse, this was the way he was greeted by the orthodox elder: "We a' feel muckle wae for your mishap, Reverend Sir, but it canna be concealed. Your silly loon, Frank, has fashed a' the congregation wi' his idle

[1] His ethical views are most fully expressed in the "Inquiry concerning Virtue," in the *Characteristicks*. The most characteristic writing of Hutcheson is the *Inquiry concerning our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*.



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cackle: for he has been babbling this oor aboot a gude and benevolent God, and that the sauls o' the heathen themsels will gang to Heeven, if they follow the licht o' their ain consciences. Not a word does the daft boy ken, speer, nor say aboot the gude auld comfortable doctrines o' election, reprobation, original sin and faith. Hoot, mon, awa' wi' sic a fellow!"[1] It was just this sincere theism of his which prevented his seeing the destructive tendency of his creed. The very reason why such a man did not see in the moral-sense theory anything destructive of the fullest belief in moral obligation was this — that he thought of this distinctive faculty as divinely implanted, a sort

[1] Quoted in the *Life of Francis Hutcheson*, by W. R. Scott, pp. 20–21.



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of divine monitor specially implanted in the human heart by an essentially righteous and benevolent God to prompt us to actions agreeable to his will and to warn us against those which He disapproved. Although it was a "sense" which revealed the right course of action to man, it was assumed that God Himself, in giving us this sense, took care to connect it with the right objects. God was thus supposed to be influenced by a real distinction between good and evil inherent in the nature of things. Hutcheson forgot to ask himself what reason, if Conscience meant nothing but a comfortable feeling, he had for believing in any essential or eternal distinction between good and evil, for thinking of God as essentially righteous, or for treating the emotion of moral



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approbation as throwing light upon the character of God — any more than the emotions of hatred or jealousy or ambition, which are no less original and undeniable emotions of the human heart, no less, upon the theistic view of the universe, ultimately put into the soul by God. The deliverances of Reason we naturally believe to be the same for God and man: nobody seriously suggests that the multiplication table is a merely human affair, and that for God it is quite possible that $2 + 2 = 5$. But why should we assume that God's emotions are exactly the same as ours, or that one emotion of ours influences Him rather than another? If Conscience means Reason, we have every ground for supposing that whatever Conscience approves, is approved by God. If Conscience is



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merely a "sense," there is no basis whatever for the religious conception which treats the voice of Conscience as the voice of God.

The real tendency of this moral sense theory was first brought out by the arch-destroyer, David Hume. Hume was far too observant a student of human nature to deny the existence, or the distinctive character, of the "reflex idea of approbation" as a matter of mere psychological fact. But his whole theory of knowledge compelled him to regard it as being at bottom (like all our other "ideas") nothing but a particular sort of sensation; and he saw with unerring insight that the mere distinctiveness of this sensation could not give it any claim to authority or superiority over other emotions. The contemplation of certain



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kinds of action gives us a certain distinctive feeling which may be called a feeling of approbation. This feeling was, he recognized, a very distinctive kind of feeling — quite unlike, for instance, the pleasures of eating and drinking. But after all, if the sense of approbation is merely a particular kind of feeling, there was no reason for preferring this particular feeling to any other if you happened to like another feeling better. The only ground for its being preferred must be that it is found more pleasant than other feelings. If the idea of approbation is simply a feeling, there is no reason why it should be attended to except in so far as it is found pleasant. "'T is evident," says Hume, "that under the term *pleasure*, we comprehend sensations which are very different from each other, and



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which have only such a distant resemblance, as is requisite to make them be express'd by the same abstract term. A good composition of music and a bottle of good wine equally produce pleasure; and what is more, their goodness is determined merely by the pleasure. But shall we say upon that account that the wine is harmonious, or the music of a good flavour?"[1] No one would contend that, so long as we look at them merely as pleasures, a man who happens to prefer music to wine should not do so merely because the taste of wine is a very distinctive taste, a taste which the purveyors of temperance drinks have unfortunately never succeeded in imitating. Equally little rea-

[1] "Treatise of Human Nature," in *Philosophical Works*, ed. Green & Grose, vol. II, p. 247–248.



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son is there for attributing any superior authority to the feeling of approbation if one happens to prefer to take one's pleasure in some other kind of satisfaction. The feeling of approbation is pleasant, no doubt; but the feelings occasioned by unpopularity — to say nothing of the rack or the thumbscrew — are decidedly unpleasant. If I happen to prefer to do without the pleasant feeling of self-approbation and so to avoid the unpleasantness of being laughed at or thumbscrewed for adopting a particular course of conduct, nobody can give me any reason why I should not do so, even if the immunity could only be purchased by the accusation of an innocent person.

Moreover, when we have once reduced our moral ideas to feelings or emotions of approbation or disapproba-



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tion, it is probable that we shall not be content to regard them as simple and unanalysable feelings, and shall try to *explain* the fact of our feeling pleasure in contemplating one kind of conduct and condemning another. This explanation Hume persuaded himself that he had found in the disinterested sympathy which we spontaneously feel with the pleasure of others. We approve certain qualities in others because we sympathize with the utility of these qualities either to their possessors or to others. It is, therefore, most conspicuously the benevolent and social affections which excite this feeling; or qualities useful in the long run to society at large, such as Justice and Loyalty. But Hume by no means excludes from the category of moral qualities personal gifts or graces



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which may be a source of pleasure to the possessor, or even external advantages such as the possession of fine clothes, since we do actually feel a disinterested sympathy with the possessors of such advantages. They do very often procure no less popularity than the qualities to which more austere thinkers have been in the habit of confining the term "moral." Hume might have supported his theory by quoting the penetrating observation of the Psalmist: "So long as thou doest well unto thyself, men will speak good of thee."

"Let us examine any hypothesis," he wrote, "by which we can account for the regard paid to the rich and powerful: we shall find none satisfactory, but that which derives it from the



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enjoyment communicated to the spectator by the images of prosperity, happiness, ease, plenty, authority, and the gratification of every appetite. . . . When we approach a man, who is, as we say, at his ease, we are presented with the pleasing ideas of plenty, satisfaction, cleanliness, warmth; a cheerful house, elegant furniture, ready service, and whatever is desirable in meat, drink, or apparel. On the contrary, when a poor man appears, the disagreeable images of want, penury, hard labour, dirty furniture, coarse or ragged cloaths, nauseous meat and distasteful liquor, immediately strike our fancy. What else do we mean by saying that one is rich, the other poor? And as regard or contempt is the natural consequence of those different situations in life, it is



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easily seen what additional light and evidence this throws on our preceding theory, with regard to all moral distinctions."[1] The theory of the moral sense thus turns out to be at bottom an apotheosis of flunkeyism. The disinterested love of virtue is put on a level with the "respect" (if that is the word for it) which a poor man may feel for a rich one from whom he is not even anticipating an invitation to dinner.

Many of you may be familiar with the portraits of eminent philosophers contained in a well-known series of prints published in this country. I have them hanging on the staircase of my house at Oxford, and I observe that of all the philosophers Hume is by far the most

[1] Hume, *Enquiry concerning Morals*, vol. IV, pp. 228–230.



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gorgeously attired. He was determined that he at least would be a man of virtue.

Further, it is to be observed that on this view it is not necessary that the qualities which excite the feeling of approbation should be qualities really useful or productive of pleasure to any one. It is enough that they should be supposed to be useful. If they do excite the distinctive feeling of approbation, *ipso facto* they are virtuous — no matter how disastrous their actual effects may be to any one else or to society at large. "The distinction of moral good and evil," he tells us, "is founded on the pleasure or pain, which results from the view of any sentiment or character; and as that pleasure or pain cannot be unknown to the person who feels it, it follows that there is just so much vice



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or virtue in any character, as every one places in it, and that 't is impossible in this particular we can ever be mistaken."[1] Virtue is defined to be "whatever mental action or quality gives to the spectator the pleasing feeling of approbation."[2] Actions, in fact, are not approved because they are moral, they are moral because they are approved.[3]

Morality, then, according to Hume, is simply a name for the fact of social approbation: and Hume represents the logical outcome of the moral sense theory. It is clear that all notion of an intrinsic, moral obligation, of an absolute

[1] *Treatise*, vol. II, p. 311.

[2] *Enquiry*, vol. IV, p. 261.

[3] To show that this line of thought is not obsolete, I may mention that substantially the same position, adapted to the requirements of Darwinism, is taken up by Professor Alexander in his *Moral Order and Progress*.



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"ought," of ethical objectivity, must disappear from such a system as this. For one and the same quality or action may excite the liveliest feelings of approbation in one man and equally lively feelings of disapprobation in another. The effort to make other people better is regarded by many as one of the most virtuous kinds of activity. There is none which is more highly applauded in the pulpit or at meetings of Church societies, or non-religious ethical societies. But I once heard a not undistinguished Oxford tutor remark, "There is nothing I hate so much as the people who want to make other people better." And nobody who heard the tone in which the oracle was uttered could doubt either the sincerity or the violence of the "disapprobation" which



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that type of character excited in that particular breast. According to Hume, people who go about trying to do what is commonly called "good" are actually bad so far as they are actually hated. The man contemplated by Plato, who combined the maximum reputation of justice with the maximum reputation for injustice, and who ended a life of social disapprobation by being crucified, would have been, according to Hume's definition, a very bad man. However enormous the increase of pleasure which might have been caused to the world by his efforts, his conduct would be wrong in so far as it actually made him unpopular. If an act excites approbation in some minds and disapprobation in others, it is right and wrong at the same time. The only objectivity



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which our moral judgements on this view can possibly possess must depend upon the counting of heads. To put the matter in the plainest possible way, Morality, according to those who reduce moral approbation to a feeling, is made by public opinion. Such a system is as fatal to the utilitarian as to any other objective standard of morality. Utility, according to Hume, is the true criterion of morality just so far as utility actually pleases. But real utility does not always please. The public does not always know its own interests; and what is useful to one circle is pernicious to others. What really matters most to a man, after all, is the approval of his own circle. Among thieves the best thief will be the most popular. In English county society we are some-



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times told that the man who is suspected of shooting a fox is more unpopular than he who has undoubtedly shot a man. According to Hume the man-slayer would, in such a *milieu*, be actually the more wicked person, while he who preserves most foxes will be the best.

It may, of course, be alleged that the emotionalist is not bound to accept the whole of Hume's system. He need not be a hedonist; he need not believe that sympathy with other people's pleasure is the only thing which excites the emotion known as moral approbation. And the older moral sense writers were undoubtedly not hedonists. But for our present purpose it does not matter what kind of emotion it is to which you appeal. You may with Hume reduce the



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distinctive moral feeling to a particular kind of pleasure excited by sympathy; or you may reduce it (with Adam Smith and many others) to a more disinterested kind of sympathy; or you may with Hutcheson insist that it is none of these things, but something absolutely *sui generis*. These distinctions may be important from other points of view; but they can make no difference as regards the objectivity of the moral judgement. Feelings or emotions possess no objectivity. And "without objectivity," in the words of Edouard von Hartmann, "Ethic has no meaning."[1]

The objection to this moral sense theory, be it observed, is not simply the practical difficulty of deciding which of two disputants in a moral dispute is

[1] *Das sittliche Bewusstsein*, p. 92.



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right and which is wrong. We do not secure ethical unanimity by simply labeling the moral consciousness Reason. On any view it must be admitted that there are considerable differences of opinion upon moral questions, just as there are differences of opinion upon questions of history and questions of science. The point is that on the moral view there is simply no meaning in asking which of the disputants is right and which is wrong. A color-blind man is not wrong when he sees no difference between a red light and a green one, unless he supposes that what appears a vague gray to him is a vague gray to normal-sighted persons. The color really is gray to him as much as it is red to a normal-sighted person. Mustard is not objectively nice or ob-



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jectively nasty. It is simply nice to one man and nasty to another: and that is the whole truth about the matter. It would, in the emotional view, be simply meaningless to ask which was right and which was wrong. If morality were a mere matter of feeling or emotion, our moral judgments would be in exactly the same case. It would be senseless to ask which was right, Nero and the Roman mob of his time to whom the torments endured by Christians in the amphitheatre were simply good sport, — "noble sport" they would probably have called it, — or the early Christians to whom they were brutal murders, and the modern world which for the most part agrees with the early Christians. The difference is merely a difference of taste. Of course, if you



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suggest that the one taste is higher than another, if you insist that the feeling which condemns such atrocities is something higher or more authoritative than the feeling which exults in them, you are really appealing to a judging faculty at the back of the mere emotional approbation; and then you have really dethroned the moral sense from the position of chief arbiter in morals and set up this new judging faculty in its place.[1] That is really to give up the moral sense view altogether. If you want to be consistent, you must accept the theory with all its consequences. You must frankly admit that, if anybody does not mind the so-called pains of Conscience and has no taste for its pleasures, there

[1] Hutcheson himself got very near to this position in his later ethical writings.



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is no reason why he should bother about them, except in so far as the majority may express their feelings of disapprobation in such a practical form as to make the following of Conscience into the more convenient course. And if you treat the pains of Conscience merely as so many disagreeable feelings, it will probably be found that they are feelings which it is pretty easy to live down.

Now the question is whether we are prepared to accept this view of the matter. Can we really persuade ourselves that there is no such thing in our minds as the sense — or to speak more accurately — the consciousness of an objective duty? Is not this idea of objectivity just the most fundamental of our moral convictions? I am not ask-



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ing, be it observed, how we ascertain that a particular course of action is right and another wrong: that is a question I have not yet touched upon. The question is whether we have not got in our minds this idea of "oughtness" or "duty," no matter to what particular actions we apply it; and whether this conception does not imply that, if I am right in judging a certain course of action to be right, you cannot be equally right in thinking it wrong? Do we not often feel most certain that there is a really right course of action just when we find our individual judgement in collision with somebody else's, or when we ourselves feel most in doubt as to what is actually the right course of action in some particular complication of circumstances? I cannot, of course, pro-



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fess to explain what this notion means to any one who is destitute of it. If it is an ultimate notion, we can as little define it as we can explain what is the meaning of space or quantity or causality to a mind which does not possess these conceptions. I only want to point out to you that, if there is in the human mind this consciousness of an objective "ought," it must be derived from the intellectual part of our nature. No mere emotion could give me such an idea. Such a concept may be accompanied by emotion; it may inspire emotion, but it is not itself mere emotion. The emotion itself presupposes the intellectual notion or category of duty.

Does any one ask, "How am I to tell that the notion of duty is not a mere emotion in disguise or a product of



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several emotions?" I reply, "How do you know that the multiplication table is not the same thing as a feeling of acquisitiveness? How do you know that your judgement that six is greater than four is not a mere wish on your part — a penchant for six in preference to four? How do you know that your judgement that if A is B and B is C, then A is C, does not express a mere personal prejudice?" You will answer that you immediately see and know that it is not so. You immediately know the difference between a desire of money and a mathematical truth, or between a valid syllogism and one with a fallacy in it. To me, at least, it is equally clear that my judgement, "This act of injustice is wrong," is not an emotion of sympathy with the person who might be injured



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by it, an instinct of tribal vengeance, a fear of hostile crowds or of ancestral ghosts, or any of the other emotions into which people have attempted to analyse away the consciousness of right or wrong.

Or does any one suggest that, though as a matter of psychological fact there is this notion of an objective good and evil in the human mind, it possesses no objective validity, but is, as one distinguished philosopher has put it,[1] a merely "subjective category"? How do we know that it is not a mere subjective delusion, if not of the individual, at least of the race? I answer, "What reason have you for supposing that the judgement two and two make four may

[1] Simmel, *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, vol. II, p. 347.



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not be a subjective illusion, or that two straight lines cannot enclose a space?" We have no reason for believing anything except the fact that we cannot help believing it. If the notion of duty is as inexpugnable a notion of the human mind as the notion of quantity or cause or substance or the like, we have every reason that we can possibly have for believing in its objective validity — every reason that we possess for confidence in the validity of those other categories. I do not contend that the *consensus* is as great about these ethical axioms as about the simplest axioms of mathematics. Self-evident truths are not equally evident to every one. Men vary enormously in their capacity for seeing the difference between a cord and a discord, and there are many who



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are quite incapable of following even very simple mathematical reasoning.

So far I have not touched upon the question what in detail are these judgements which the moral reason gives us. I have not, for instance, touched upon the question whether there are a host of isolated unrelated judgements about particular acts or about classes of acts which we pass immediately and as it were instinctively, without any calculation as to their consequences for social well-being; or whether acts are right or wrong according as they tend or do not tend to produce social well-being. I do not propose to discuss this question in these lectures. Both views have been taken by thinkers who agree in the fundamental doctrine that moral judgements are the work of Reason. I



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want as far as possible to keep this issue — the old controversy between the intuitionists and the utilitarians — out of sight in these lectures. But, as I am inviting you to believe that there are such things as self-evident moral judgements, I think it will conduce to clearness if I tell you what in my opinion these propositions are. I do not believe that an act can be pronounced right or wrong without any reference to its consequences so far as such consequences can be foreseen; but the judgement, "The greater good ought always to be preferred to the less," or (to put it in another form), "It is always right to promote the greatest possible good," does present itself to me as absolutely self-evident. So is the judgement, "One man's good is of equal in-



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trinsic value with the like good of any other," with its implication, "I ought always, so far as possible, to produce an equal distribution of good among all the people who can be affected by my action." To these two axioms of rational benevolence and equity or justice, Sidgwick adds an "axiom of prudence": "Where my own good is concerned, it is always reasonable for me to prefer my own greater good to my own lesser good." But this is rarely contained in the axiom of rational benevolence, and need not be treated as an independent axiom. It is, however, extremely important to observe that these axioms will never tell us what particular actions are right or wrong till we have settled what is this "good" which ought to be promoted equally or



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impartially for all mankind. And, therefore, at bottom, the real ethical judgement is the judgement of value which affirms that such and such things are good. For our present purpose it makes no difference what it is which we pronounce good. The utilitarian who declares that it is always a man's duty to promote the greatest possible pleasure, or the austere moralist who says that nothing is good but virtue, is equally appealing to what seems to him a self-evident truth, an intuition, an *a priori* judgement.

What is this supreme end or good by reference to which we ought to pronounce acts right or wrong, it is not my present task to decide. It must suffice to say that I do not myself accept the hedonistic conception of the good. I do



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believe that pleasure is good, but it is not *the* good. It seems to me the clearest of all deliverances of the moral consciousness that virtue or goodness or the good-will possesses an intrinsic value — a higher intrinsic value than any other good. Knowledge, intellectual activity, æsthetic culture, and the like also appear to me goods, the value of which is not to be measured by the amount of pleasure which they bring with them; or (to express the same doctrine in other words), pleasures differ in kind, and their value does not depend merely upon their quantity.

Such is my own view of the matter. But, once more, to determine the relative value of different goods or elements in the good is not my present subject. I have only touched upon that



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problem in order to explain what I mean by saying that the ultimate moral judgement is a judgement of value. It pronounces this or that to be good; and out of the different judgements as to particular goods it builds up an ideal of life as a whole. To take this view does not in any way get rid of the fundamental analysable character of the concept of "duty"; for the idea of good implies the idea of right. The good means just what ought to be promoted — by every one who has the power of doing so. If an end is good, it must be my duty to promote it so far as it does not interfere with any greater good. If an end is *the* good, it must be the ultimate end aimed at by every right action. Equally true is it to say that the idea of duty implies the notion



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of good: for upon reflection it appears that my duty must consist in the promotion of the good. The good and the right are correlative conceptions which imply each other, just as the convex implies the concave and the concave the convex. They both involve the same single analysable idea which can be expressed in many ways but can never be defined — the good, oughtness, value, duty, the reasonable in conduct, the end of life, and so on. On the whole, the word which best expresses the notion which lies at the root of all morality is the word "value."

I have tried to give you reasons for rejecting the view that our moral judgements are merely a formulated result of some kind of feeling or emotion, and for believing that they come from the



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rational or intellectual part of our nature — that they represent one particular activity of that same self which also gives us the fundamental intellectual truths which are presupposed by all thinking and all knowing; and therefore can claim the same kind of objective truth or validity as the axioms of mathematics or those self-evident laws of thought upon which in the last result all scientific reasoning depends. In opposition to this something like the old moral sense view is still occasionally defended in modern times — for instance, in the writings of the late Professor Gizycki, till recently a professor at Berlin.[1] But most of those who now seek to dissolve our moral judge-

[1] See *An Introduction to the Study of Ethics*, adapted from the German of G. M. Gizycki, by Stanton Coit, Ph.D., pp. 87 sq.



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ments into emotions do so in a very different way. Some of you will, I fear, feel that there is something rather obsolete and academic in this controversy between moral reason and moral sense with which I have to-day been dealing. They will suggest that the idea of a moral sense is as obsolete as the notion of a moral reason; and will desiderate some reference to more modern views on the subject — to such views as those maintained by evolutionary or naturalistic moralists like Professor Westermarck and Dr. McDougall. In my next lecture I shall come to close quarters with such theories. I will only say by way of apology for the present lecture that I hope to show you next time that the considerations which I have urged against the old moral sense view of



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ethics are just as valid against the more modern, more evolutionary, forms of emotionalism which have taken their place.

Meanwhile, let me say a word as to the importance of the position which I have been trying to defend. It is only upon the assumption that our ultimate moral judgements represent real deliverances of Reason — self-evident judgements about the real nature of things — that we are justified in using them to interpret to ourselves the nature and meaning of the Universe in which we live. There are many lines of thought which lead up to the great conviction that the ultimate Reality is spiritual, and if spiritual, then purposeful. But as to what the purpose is, there is only one possible source of information; and that



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is the moral consciousness of man. If our judgements of value are valid pronouncements of Reason, we have the right to claim that in the moral consciousness of man at its highest there is contained a true revelation of the rational Will which expresses itself in nature. If we accept that clue to the meaning of the Universe, we may, on the testimony of our moral judgements, proceed to the further assertion that the character of God is best summed up in the one word "Love." And upon that fact must rest the main burden of the hope that this present life — with all its inequalities and its injustices, with all its sinfulness and imperfection and unfulfilled aspiration — is not the whole life of man, but only a stage — a preparatory or educational stage — in the develop-



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ment that is designed for human souls by the greater Spirit from which their being is derived. The hope of Immortality must rest mainly upon our belief in a righteous and loving God, and the belief in a righteous God is in the main an inference based upon the perfectly clear and definite pronouncements of the moral consciousness — that moral consciousness which, as I have endeavored to show you, is no mere sense or emotion, but a particular activity of that selfsame Reason, the validity of which is presupposed by all our knowledge.

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# II

## THE MORALITY OF SAVAGES

In my last lecture I examined the question whether our moral judgements are in ultimate analysis merely statements asserting the existence of a particular kind of feeling in particular minds, or whether they are intellectual judgements of universal validity — judgements, of course, of a very peculiar and distinctive kind, but just as much intellectual and universal judgements about the nature of Reality as the judgements $2 + 2 = 4$, or "this is a good inference and that is a bad one." I tried to show you that on the former view our moral judgements could possess no objective validity — no more so than the judgements which express my personal



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liking for mustard or somebody else's personal dislike for it. And yet I contended that we do, most of us, feel at the bottom of our minds a strong and ineradicable conviction that there is this eternal, irreducible distinction between right and wrong — that it belongs (as it were) to the innermost essence of things, so much so that in many minds it leads to the further conviction that the whole universe must in some way be governed in accordance with those laws of right and wrong which are revealed in the moral consciousness of man, — that conviction which expresses itself in the familiar words of Wordsworth's impassioned "Ode to Duty": —

"Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens, through thee,
are fresh and strong."



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I am not, for the moment, asking how far this further inference is warranted. I am only appealing to the fact that it is drawn as a proof of the depth of the conviction that the distinction between right and wrong is objectively valid, and not a mere statement as to the emotional constitution of a particular individual or even a particular species. All such convictions will have to be treated as mere illusions if it could be shown that the moral consciousness is at bottom nothing but a particular kind of feeling excited by the contemplation of certain types of character or conduct.

In the present lecture I propose to examine a new form of what may be comprehensively called "Emotionalism in Ethics." The older moral sense school of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson



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believed in a single distinctive feeling of approbation or disapprobation. Even Hume did not deny the existence of such a specific feeling, though he recognized more distinctly than his predecessors that such a feeling could have no greater authority or validity than it derived from its actual pleasurableness to the individual. Many recent writers on Ethics, who approach the subject from a purely anthropological or psychological point of view, altogether deny the existence of any such specific moral feeling or emotion. They treat the moral consciousness as a complex of many different feelings or emotions. And further, they rest their position, not upon a mere analysis of the moral consciousness as it exists in the developed mind of the modern civilized man, but



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upon a wide survey of the evolution of morality out of the non-moral consciousness of the lower animals and the imperfectly moral consciousness of the savage. This line of thought (though, of course, it does not represent anything fundamentally new) has received a new lease of life through the enormous accumulation of illustrative facts accumulated by Professor Westermarck in his "Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas." But, valuable as is his great history of moral ideas as a piece of pure anthropology, he really adds little to the arguments used before him by such writers as Hume in favor of the emotional theory. A far stronger case for the emotional view is presented by an Oxford Reader in Psychology, Dr. McDougall, in his book on "Social



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Psychology." The tendency of previous writers who approached morality from a more or less naturalistic standpoint was either to explain morality entirely by what Mill called "the sympathetic feelings of mankind," or to make all moral rules the results of deliberate utilitarian calculation on the part of primitive societies, or to base it on some combination of instinctive sympathy and deliberate calculation. Dr. McDougall knows a great deal too much about primitive man to suppose that either he or his animal ancestors were the cold-blooded utilitarians which the older naturalistic theories supposed. He knows that primitive man was governed for the most part by instinct, and the emotions accompanying instinct, rather than by deliberate calculation,



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and he knows that the emotions by which he is influenced are by no means all of them emotions of a sympathetic or altruistic character. Dr. McDougall traces the emergence of human morality to the development, under the influence of growing intelligence, of many different instincts which exist in the lower animals, together with the emotional excitements which accompany the exercise of these instincts.

The instincts which have, according to Dr. McDougall, played the largest part in the evolution of morality, are these: (1) the reproductive and parental instincts, with which is connected what Dr. McDougall calls "tender emotion," the earliest form of social feeling; (2) the instinct of pugnacity, with which are connected the emotions



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of resentment and revenge, broadening, through complications with other instincts, into indignation at various kinds of anti-social conduct and giving rise to the practice of punishment and the whole machinery of criminal justice; (3) the instinct of kind, or the gregarious instinct, which inclines an animal to be more friendly to members of its own species than to other species, resulting in the formation of tribes and other communities, and forming the basis of the emotion which produces loyalty toward the community and the chief; (4) the instincts of acquisition and construction, which have been developed with the idea of property and the moral judgments connected therewith;[1] (5) the in-

[1] Other writers attach much importance to a distinct instinct of Imitation. The idea that the usual or



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stincts of self-abasement (or subjection) and of self-assertion (or self-display), with which are connected the emotions called by M. Guyau "positive and negative self-feeling," but which Dr. McDougall prefers to call, more simply, the emotions of "subjection" and "elation." The instinct of subjection is invoked to explain the respect paid to superiors divine or human: the instinct of elation is the basis of self-respect. I will not attempt to reproduce in detail Dr. McDougall's attempts to trace the formation of sentiments which he distinguishes from emotions as "organized systems of emotional tendencies centered about some object." Of these sen-

habitual mode of behaviour comes to be looked upon as moral has been specially developed by Simmel in his *Moral-wissenschaft*.



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timents the most important from a moral point of view are love, hatred, respect, admiration. These psychological details do not much concern us here. The problem which I wish to discuss is not so much the question "What is the origin of particular moral judgements, or into what particular emotions can our moral judgements be analysed?" as the wider problem, "Can moral approbation or disapprobation be analysed into any emotions whatever?" It may be admitted that, if the thing could be done at all, Dr. McDougall's account of the matter is the most plausible that has yet been given.

There can be no doubt that anthropology is the trump card of the emotional moralists. It must be admitted, I think, that ethical writers who have approached



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the subject from the point of view of metaphysics and metaphysical ethics have not come to sufficiently close quarters with the problem suggested by these anthropological evolutionists. They have too often simply washed their hands of primitive man and his morality, and indeed of all questions about the gradual growth of the moral consciousness, whether in the race or in the individual. They have protested (in the hackneyed formula) that questions of origin have nothing to do with the question of validity, and confined themselves to analysing the moral consciousness of the developed adult in a developed society. Consequently they have not always recognized the elements of truth which are to be found in anthropological theories of morality, and have failed to win re-



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spect for their own speculations on the part of those who are familiar with the facts which they ignore. For my own part, I find it impossible to read such books as those of Professor Westermarck and Dr. McDougall without being convinced of this much — that the instincts and accompanying emotions on which they insist really have a great deal to do with the origin of what is ordinarily called morality — morality as it was in its earliest stage of development. It cannot, I think, be denied that the explanation why certain particular kinds of conduct first came to be approved or disapproved really is to be found in emotions of a kind which in a simpler and more primitive form are shared by the lower animals. And, even when we turn to the savage's notion



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of "right" and "wrong" in general, it must be granted that the state of mind which induces him to resent anti-social, or even any sort of uncustomary conduct, is very like the state of mind which impels a flock of wild birds to put to death (if the popular belief be true) the escaped cage-bird, whose behavior is unlike that of its wild fellow creatures; which inspires an elephant with revengeful feelings toward the man who has injured it, sometimes a year or more ago; which induces gregarious animals to unite in defending one another against the common foe. I find it impossible to deny that when we see a squirrel making a little hoard of nuts and resenting the action of any other squirrel which interferes with them, we do see before us the beginning of the tendency which



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culminates in the fully developed notion of property, or that the monogamous instinct of the higher apes is the basis of the hardly less instinctive monogamy of most savage tribes. There is, no doubt, room for much criticism upon the details of Dr. McDougall's analysis. He does not quite escape, as it seems to me, what is known as the fallacy of "mental chemistry" — the tendency to forget that, where two feelings or emotions combine to make another, the resulting emotion is not really the same as the two others put together, but something quite new: that the combined emotions do not really underlie the resultant emotion as the oxygen and the hydrogen are, according to chemical theory, present in the water which their combination calls into existence. Emo-



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tions which are not actually present in consciousness do not in fact exist at all. Nor does he allow sufficiently, perhaps, for the alteration which is effected in human emotions by the growth of the general intelligence which accompanies them. The human mother's affection for her child becomes a different thing from the animal mother's instinctive rush to rescue her offspring from danger, just because it is more reflective, because a rational regard for the child's welfare as a whole enters into the motives of the mother in a way in which it cannot be supposed to do in the case of the animal.[1] But such criticisms do not really go to the root of the matter.

[1] This modification is very carefully traced by Professor L. T. Hobhouse in his two books, *The Intelligence of Animals*, and *Morals in Evolution*.



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The question remains, "Is there anything in the idea of right and wrong which is not mere emotion? Can we admit all these evolutionary facts, and still adhere to the old rationalistic position — that our judgments of right and wrong, good and evil, represent distinct, irreducible categories or ultimate intellectual notions, just as little capable of being analysed away into emotions, no matter how subtle or how much complicated by fusion with one another or how much directed by intelligence and foresight, as the intellectual notions which underlie the multiplication table or the rules of the syllogism?"

I proceed, then, to ask how far we can discern in the consciousness of the lowest savages the notion of duty as it exists in the developed moral conscious-



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ness. It must be acknowledged that it is difficult to detect. In the savage mother's love of her offspring, in the savage warrior's admiration for courage, in his resentment against the violation of tribal custom, in his hatred of his tribe's enemies, in his passionate desire to avenge the death of a slaughtered kinsman, in his jealous indignation against interference with his marital rights, it is difficult to detect anything which is not *ejusdem generis* with the passions which, in less developed form, may be inferred, from his outward behavior under similar circumstances, to exist in the breast of the savage's remote simian ancestor. The savage has no such concepts as those which writers like Kant regard as the fundamental conceptions of morality. He has no no-



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tion of the intrinsic worth of the human being as such: for he attributes no value to the life of a man belonging to another tribe, or at least of a hostile tribe. He has no notion that what is right for him would be right for any other man under the same circumstances, for his morality does not rise above obedience to tribal custom. He expects another tribe to have other customs, and he draws little or no distinction between what we should call principles of eternal and immutable morality and the most arbitrary rule of his particular tribe. That he should not marry a member of a particular clan is as binding and as ultimate a rule with him as that he should not deprive another man of his wife. That he should not kill the totem animal, except by way of sacrifice, is as



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sacred a law as that he should not kill his fellow tribesman. If it is the tribal custom to black the teeth, the omission to do so is looked upon exactly in the same light as what we should call vice or crime. That most of the savage's actual morality and of his intellectual beliefs about morality can be satisfactorily explained upon the emotional view seems to me clear. I should even be prepared to admit that quite possibly the whole of it might be so explained. Indeed, if we only go low enough in the scale of evolution, such an admission is inevitable. Nobody contends for the existence of a category of duty or of absolute value in the dog or even in the monkey. And it is at least quite conceivable that these fundamental notions of developed morality may be equally



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absent in the lowest savages. It would not matter, for the purpose of our argument, if we had to ascend to a comparatively advanced stage in the development of morality before we reached any ideas about human conduct that could, with the most liberal allowance for the difference between an explicit and an implicit notion, be described as a sense of duty. Let us suppose, for instance, (to put the matter in an extreme way) that Socrates was the first man who ever definitely conceived, and was influenced by, the idea of duty; that will not alter the fact that such a notion did exist in the mind of Socrates, and in many men since Socrates. Nor will it in the slightest degree affect the validity of the concept. If there is such a notion in the developed human being, and if it



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was absent in the beast from whom he is descended, it must have had a beginning at some time or other. For ethical purposes, it will make no difference whether that beginning is to be traced in the earliest mammals who were capable of speech, or whether it appeared for the first time in the Homeric age, or whether we pronounce that Socrates's father and mother were still in the stage of merely emotional morality; while Socrates himself was the first human being to make a distinct moral judgment definitely involving the category of duty. Once rid ourselves of the notion that because the appearance in consciousness of an intellectual notion or concept had (so far as human minds are concerned) a beginning in time, it is shown to be a delusion and an impos-



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ture or a mere amalgam of simpler concepts or of feelings which were not concepts at all — once recognize that the late appearance of a notion in the historical development of the human mind has nothing to do with the question of its validity, and the enquiry *when* human morality ceased to be merely emotional and became what ethical Rationalists have taken it to be, becomes a matter of merely historical or biological interest. The notion of duty, or the notion of an absolute good which really carries with it the notion of duty, if it exists in the developed human intellect of to-day, is not shown to be invalid because our ancestors — human, subhuman, or animal — had it not, any more than the validity of the multiplication table is affected by the discovery



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(if discovery it be) that some savages cannot count more than five, or by the undeniable fact that we have all passed through a mental stage of mental development in which we could not count even up to five.

Granted, then, that it is conceivable that primitive morality was all a matter of emotion, guided, of course, by the ordinary understanding, the question may be raised, "What reason is there for supposing that this is not so with the developed morality of the civilized man?" I can only reply once more that the existence of a distinct category of moral obligation or value must be a matter of immediate consciousness. I know by immediate introspection that I can form these judgements of value. I know that such assertions as, "This



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ought to be," or "Happiness is part of the true end of human life and pain is not," or "Goodness is of more value than pleasure," or "Intellectual pleasures are intrinsically better than the pleasures of eating and drinking," or "It is unjust to treat one man in a different way from that in which I treat another man of equal intrinsic worth in the same circumstances," or "A larger amount of good is always more valuable than a smaller amount, and therefore I ought not to prefer a smaller amount of my own good to a larger amount of other people's" — I know that such judgements present to my mind a distinct meaning, and a quite different meaning from the assertion, "I personally desire happiness for myself or for others," or "I am afraid of tribal vengeance or of



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social disapproval if I do not promote the general well-being," or "I feel within me an instinct of pugnacity which induces me to avenge an insult to my tribe or my family." The notion is undoubtedly there in my mind — that is a matter of direct psychological analysis. And if the question be not as to the existence of this ultimate notion, but as to its validity, I can only ask what reason I have for believing the multiplication table to be objectively valid which I have not for believing in the validity of my judgement, "Pain is bad but sin is worse."

The question, be it remembered, is not as to the infallibility of my personal judgement. The individual human intellect is not infallible, whether in science, in mathematics, or in morals. Every



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schoolmaster knows that mistakes are made even in doing sums of simple arithmetic: but that does not make any sensible person doubt the objective validity of our mathematical judgments in general. When two schoolboys bring out a different answer to the same sum, the one point about which both agree is that, if A's answer is right, B's must be wrong: it never occurs to the least mathematical child to say to his master, "True, you and the arithmetic book make 50 + 100 = 150, but my mind is differently constituted and for me they make 151, and it is mere dogmatism on your part to insist that your answer is any more objectively right than mine." And so, when one of my austerer friends assures me that in his opinion pleasure is not a good at all,



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and pain no evil, that does not in any way shake my belief in the validity of ethical judgements in general. I may strongly suspect that he really thinks much as I do: I may observe that he acts not only in his self-regarding conduct — when, for instance, he inhales laughing-gas before a dental operation, and has no scruple in paying money for it, but also in his philanthropic activities — very much as if he did think that pain was an evil. I may suspect that he is betrayed by ambiguities of language or misleading associations into using words which do not express his real conviction. Still, I am not bound to deny that some people really do think that pleasure is bad — just as there are others who equally differ from me in supposing it to be the



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only good. But that no more makes me doubt the validity of the ethical judgement as such than my belief in the laws of the syllogism is shaken by the fact that, in every political campaign, the platforms on both sides are liberally strewn with syllogisms containing undistributed middles and similar logical enormities. In the judgement of my austere friend that pleasure is bad, I can detect the presence of the same category of value which I employ in my own judgement that some pleasures are very good. It does not shake my belief in the validity of that category that it is sometimes misapplied, any more than I doubt the validity of the category of causality or of the laws of thought, because two equally eminent men of science may draw different inferences from



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the same facts. If we ever take to doubting whether what we really cannot help thinking is true, we embark upon a line of thought which must end in pure skepticism — a skepticism which will leave us no ground for asserting the truth of anything — about ethics or any other subject. Such a position will be as fatal to the contentions of Professor Westermarck and Dr. McDougall as to those of Kant or of Hegel.

On these grounds, the fullest demonstration of the purely emotional character of morality as it appears in primitive man would not shake my conviction that in the moral judgements of developed man — the judgements that I am conscious of making myself, and the judgements I find others making, includ-



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ing very often (in their unguarded moments) the keenest supporters of ethical subjectivity—there is to be found a distinct category of human thought, with just as much title to objective validity as any other of our ultimate intellectual categories.

The objection which will probably be made by any one to whom such a position may seem novel, lies in the difficulty of envisaging the transition from the merely emotional, quasi-instinctive, customary morality of the savage and the rational morality of civilized antiquity or of modern Europe. I suggested as an abstract possibility that, even if Socrates were the first man in whose ethical judgements the category of duty could be detected, that would not involve the denial of its validity. But,



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of course, the hypothesis would be an extreme one. Categories do not spring up suddenly in the human mind *per saltum*, any more than they do in the evolution of an individual child. Their appearance is usually so gradual that it would never be possible to say, "This intelligent child has the notion, but his father and his mother were wholly innocent of it." To trace in detail the gradual evolution of purely emotional into rational morality would be a great task, — a task for the performance of which we should want a thinker who should be as well acquainted with anthropological facts and theories as Professor Westermarck, as well acquainted with comparative and social psychology as Dr. McDougall, but who was at the same time a thoroughly trained



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metaphysician, capable of fully understanding what was meant by the great philosophers of the past when they declared that the moral faculty was Reason. The most valuable contribution toward a solution of this problem which I know is to be found in Professor L. T. Hobhouse's "Morals in Evolution." Professor Hobhouse shows, I cannot but think, far more appreciation of the real problem at issue than either of the two writers whom I have mentioned. But his work is primarily a history rather than an argument, and he has not very explicitly attempted to answer the precise problem with which I am now dealing. I feel sure that on the whole I may appeal to Professor Hobhouse's authority in support of the view which I am endeavoring to set before



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you, but I prefer to deal with the matter in my own way without attempting any exposition or criticism of his very able work. I will offer three suggestions which may help you to envisage the way in which transition between purely emotional and rational morality may have taken place:—

(1) Some help may be derived from the analogy of other intellectual notions. Take the category of quantity. Where in the scale of evolution does it begin to manifest itself? The lowest kinds of conscious beings in all probability do not possess it at all: it is improbable that the amœba, if it can be said to judge, judges quantitatively. But a bird can at least recognize that its nest has been disturbed and some of its eggs abstracted. It has sometimes been con-



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tended that such a recognition involves no notion of quantity as distinct from quality. The animal merely recognizes, it is suggested, a certain dissimilarity between the condition of the nest as it was and as it is. And yet, when the dissimilarity is analysed, it does in point of fact consist in the fact that, whereas there were five eggs, now there are four. It can hardly, therefore, be denied, that something quantitative has found some kind of entrance into the animal's mind in however obscure a form. There may be some truth in the ordinary schoolboy tradition that a bird will miss two eggs in a nest of six, but will not miss one: but still, to appreciate the difference between four eggs and six implies a certain awareness of quantity. And yet, what a gulf between such an ap-



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prehension of quantity and the notion of it entertained by the stupidest savage, who would at once discern that his ten children had been reduced to nine, and understand quite clearly what was meant by that assertion. And what a gulf between the savage's state of mind and such an abstract notion of quantity as is possessed by a civilized child of ten who had learned a little arithmetic and a little geometry! And yet even the child's notion of quantity is not that of the advanced mathematician; and even the totally unphilosophical mathematician may possibly be said (if the audacity of the suggestion may be pardoned) to have a less distinct and abstract notion of quantity than the logician or metaphysician who has had his attention specially directed to such questions as



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the difference between quality and quantity. An equally good illustration might be supplied by an examination of the idea of cause. It is possible, for instance, that at the lowest level of human thought there is hardly any appreciation of the difference between necessary connection and habitual association, and that it was only gradually — at a tolerably late stage of intellectual development — that the distinction was fully grasped, while even now it is by no means thoroughly appreciated by uneducated persons. If so, that would be a pretty close parallel to what I suppose to have taken place in the case of morality.[1]

[1] It is true that the savage always seems to possess the notion of activity which he derives from his own consciousness of volition, but, in so far as he applies the idea of causality to entities not thought of as con-



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(2) While I have been prepared to admit as a possibility that, in the very lowest stages of savage morality, the notion of moral obligation may be absent altogether, analogy would lead us to believe that at a fairly early stage it would be present in some rudimentary form. For the savage the moral is no doubt to a great extent the customary, and yet for many savages it is probable that the words "right" and "customary" do not mean exactly the same thing. Let us suppose that we could put a savage, not of the very lowest type, but whose morality was still in the customary stage, through a little catechism of this kind. "You are a member of a

sclous beings, the statement is probably true. One must remark in this connection that "confusion of categories" of which I have spoken below.



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clan which has a Hare for its totem, and therefore you are exogamous, and must not marry a woman of the same clan." "Quite so," he would reply. "But if you were a member of the Rabbit-clan, in another tribe, you would be endogamous, and it would then be wrong for you to marry outside your clan." "Yes, I suppose so." "Then it is right for each man to follow the customs of his own tribe?" "It seems so," would probably be his answer. And there would be, I think, in this notion, "it is right," something more than the notion, "it is customary," or the admission that a man would feel an emotional discomfort if he breaks the rule, or that his conduct would excite in those about him an emotional discomfort which might provoke them into scalping him. There would be some-



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thing more, though as yet the reasons or causes which induce him to invest particular kinds of conduct with the notion of rightness might be almost entirely those of the kind commonly recognized in anthropological explanations of morality: and though this savage's obscure notion of "oughtness" may be something very different from the distinct consciousness of duty as it manifested itself in a Socrates or a Kant.

I might illustrate this purely hypothetical dialogue by an actual one which I take from Professor Westermarck: "The rule of custom is conceived of as a moral rule, which decides what is right and wrong. . . . Mr. Howitt once said to a young Australian native with whom he was speaking about



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the food prohibited during initiation, 'But if you were hungry and caught a female opossum, you might eat it if the old men were not there.' The youth replied, 'I could not do that: it would not be right'; and he could give no other reason than that it would be wrong to disregard the customs of his people."[1] That savage was clearly in the state of mind in which the details of his moral code were fixed by custom: but it is equally clear that the idea of right and wrong found a place in his thoughts, and that it was an idea which could not possibly be explained by any of the instinctive tendencies enumerated by anthropologists. The imitative instinct is the one which might most plausibly be

[1] *Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. I, p. 118.



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invoked: but it will be observed that the young savage does not say merely "it would be against the custom of the tribe." I don't know anything about this Australian language, but it appears to have got a word for "right," and, even if the savage said to himself, "the customary is right," that shows that he drew some distinction between the two notions. He meant something more than "the customary is customary." I do not gather that missionaries find it impossible to translate the terms "right" and "wrong" into very primitive languages, nor do I find it anywhere stated that the terms used really mean only "customary." People do not invent words for notions which do not exist even in their own minds; and, if there is no such a thing as rightness, how comes the no-



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tion to have got into that young Australian's mind? No doubt the idea is there in a very germinal form. The story might even suggest that the young savage was led by Mr. Howitt's question for the first time to realize that his moral conceptions implied something more than fear of what the old man would say or think or do. Had it not been very indistinct and chaotic, he could not have supposed (as he possibly did suppose) that to eat the female opossum during initiation would be a crime on a level with the killing of a fellow tribesman. But the notion was distinctly there which, when fully developed, would first diminish the sense of guilt at the eating of the female opossum during initiation, and ultimately abolish the whole system of initiation and all the ideas



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connected with it. Professor Hobhouse, who is a philosopher as well as an anthropologist, acutely remarks that one of the mental infirmities to which the mind of primitive man is most liable is confusion of categories. He is referring to purely intellectual categories, but what he says is equally true of the savage's moral ideas. "One conception melts readily into another," he tells us, "just as in primitive fancy a sorcerer turns into a dragon, a mouse, a stone, and a butterfly without the smallest difficulty. Hence similarity is treated as if it were physical identity. The physical individuality of things is not observed. The fact that a thing was *mine* makes it appear as though there were something of *me* in it, so that by burning it you make me smart. The borders or



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limits of things are not marked out, but their influence and their capacity to be influenced extends, as it were, in a misty halo over everything connected with them in any fashion. If the attributes of things are made too solid and material in primitive thought, things themselves are too fluid and undefined, passing into each other by loose and easy identifications which prevent all clear and crisp distinctions of thought. In a word, primitive thought has not yet evolved those distinctions of substance and attribute, quality and relation, cause and effect, identity and difference, which are the common property of civilized thought. These categories which among us every child soon comes to distinguish in practice are for primitive thought interwoven in wild confusion, and this confusion is



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the intellectual basis of animism and of magic."[1]

For minds in this stage of development it is not to be supposed that the notion of "right" exists in a perfectly clear and distinct form. There may be much confusion between the customary and the right. But still we cannot say that the savage mind is altogether without the notion of right any more than we can say, without qualification, that it has no notion whatever of substance or of attribute, or of the relation between cause and effect. There is no greater difficulty in supposing a purely emotional and customary morality to have passed into a rational and more or less reflective morality than in supposing (what is undoubtedly a fact) that

[1] *Morals in Evolution*, vol. II, pp. 20–21.



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minds which had no notion of the distinction between substance and attribute passed by slow stages into minds which had a hazy notion of it, and from that stage into one in which the distinction was apprehended as sharply and clearly as it is to-day in the mind of a philosopher like Professor Hobhouse.

The moral ideas of savages are full of similar confusions. Sin, for instance, is often treated as a kind of physical disease or a sort of imponderable fluid, capable of being transferred from one person to another or from a human being to an animal, and of being removed by physical processes of purification and the like. But beneath all this confusion there is to be detected the germs of a notion which the emotionalistic ethic is quite incapable of explaining.



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The very materialism of primitive moral ideas is a sufficient proof of their objectivity. It is not only in very primitive times that people have a tendency to imagine that whatever is real is material and occupies space. In a recent controversy a very eminent professor of theology in England showed that he regarded mind as something which occupies space quite as much as matter.

(3) At a very early stage in the development of morality we begin to discover not merely a hazy notion of right and wrong in general, but particular moral ideas which cannot be explained by any of the emotions which figure in naturalistic ethics. This appears most distinctly in the primitive notion of justice. Justice has been called the most intellectual of the virtues. Doubtless



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the savage has no notion that he ought to treat every other human being as an end in himself or to treat him in the way in which he could rationally will that he should be treated himself in similar circumstances, or the like. He would think it monstrous to treat a member of another clan as of equal value with his fellow clansman or a chief in the same way as a common man. But still, if the chief proposed to tax A twice as much as B, — both being members of his own tribe, of the same rank, wealth, and so on, — even a very low savage would probably see and condemn the injustice; and he would do so none the less if the favored person were his private friend and the other man a stranger or even, perhaps, a private enemy. I do not think this con-



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demnation could be accounted for merely by the fusion of a blind acquisitive instinct with the instinct of kind, or by any other species of emotional alchemy. I believe that we can trace in such a judgement the operation in an obscure way of just the same ultimate principle which underlies the most abstract judgements about right and wrong to be found in the pages of Kant or of Sidgwick, though the man who made it would be quite incapable of working it out and eliciting from it all the consequences which it carries with it for those philosophers. All travelers testify to the strength of the sense of justice in savages. Here I may appeal to the admission of Professor Westermarck himself: "Various data prove that the lower races have some feeling of justice,



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the flower of all moral feelings. And the supposition that remorse is unknown among them is not only unfounded, but contradicted by facts. Indeed, genuine remorse is so hidden an emotion even among ourselves that it cannot be expected to be very conspicuous among savages. As we have seen, it requires a certain power of abstraction, as well as great impartiality of feeling, and must therefore be sought for at the highest reaches of the moral consciousness rather than at its lowest degrees." [1]

I will quote another passage from Professor Hobhouse: — "Justice as we understand it — the rendering to each man his due as judged by an impartial authority — is not distinctly conceived

[1] *Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. I, p. 124.



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as a social duty in primitive ethics, and that is what, morally speaking, differentiates the primitive ethical consciousness from the ethical consciousness at a higher stage of development. Yet primitive ethics works upon rules in which a certain measure of justice is embodied. Thus, in the first place, custom prescribes certain rules of retaliation which are recognized as right and proper and have the approval of the neighbors and clansmen. The simplest and earliest of these rules is the famous *Lex talionis.* 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' comes to us from the chapter of Exodus, but far earlier than Exodus in its first formulation. We find it, like many other primitive rules of law, in the recently discovered Code of King Hammurabi, which is earlier than



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the Book of the Covenant, perhaps by thirteen hundred years, and we find it at the present day among people sociologically at an earlier stage of development than the Babylonians of the third millennium before Christ. . . . In some cases the idea of exact retaliation is carried out with the utmost literalness — a grotesque literalness sometimes, as when a man who has killed another by falling on him from a tree is put to death by exactly the same method — a relation of the deceased solemnly mounting the tree, and, much one would say at his own risk, descending upon the offender." [1]

Crude as such applications of it may be, the root of the highest morality is really involved in this "impartiality of

[1] *Morals in Evolution*, vol. I, pp. 84–85.



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feeling," the existence of which is admitted by Professor Westermarck. To feel impartially about conduct means in effect to look at it rationally or objectively. Emotion is essentially partial, personal, subjective. It is only so far as he is a rational being that any one is capable of impartially judging between the claims of one man and those of another — whether that other be himself or a third person. That the savage is to some extent, though it may be to a very limited extent, capable of adopting that attitude — at least as between fellow tribesmen — is not denied by the naturalistic moralists. "The predicate of a moral judgement always involves a notion of disinterestedness," says Professor Westermarck. "... If I pronounce an act done to a friend or



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to an enemy to be either good or bad, that implies that I assume it to be so independently of the fact that a person to whom the act is done is my friend or my enemy." [1] And again, still more emphatically he declares that "a moral motive has a certain flavor of generality."

It may be well to quote the whole passage: — "Finally, a moral emotion has a certain flavour of generality. We have previously noticed that a moral judgment very frequently implies some vague assumption that it must be shared by everybody who possesses both a sufficient knowledge of the case and a 'sufficiently developed' moral consciousness. We have seen, however, that this

[1] *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, vol. 1, pp. 102–04.



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assumption is illusory. It cannot, consequently, be regarded as a *conditio sine quâ non* for a moral judgment, unless, indeed, it be maintained that such a judgment, owing to its very nature, is necessarily a chimera — an opinion which, to my mind, would be simply absurd. But, though moral judgments cannot lay claim to universality or 'objectivity,' it does not follow that they are merely individual estimates. Even he who fully sees their limitations must admit that, when he pronounces an act to be good or bad, he gives expression to something more than a personal opinion, that his judgement has reference, not only to his own feelings, but to the feelings of others as well. And this is true even though he be aware that his own conviction is not shared by those



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around him, nor by anybody else. He then feels that it *would be* shared if other people knew the act and all its attendant circumstances as well as he does himself, and if, at the same time, their emotions were as refined as are his own. This feeling gives to his approval or indignation a touch of generality, which belongs to public approval and public indignation, but which is never found in any merely individual emotion of gratitude or revenge."[1]

Wherever we see this tendency to look at conduct from an impartial, an impersonal, a universal standpoint, we see the operation of Reason in ethics. Professor Hobhouse, whose appreciation of the real nature of morality,

[1] *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, vol. 1, pp. 104–05.



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whether in savage or civilized man, is to my mind immeasurably superior to any that one can find in the merely anthropological or psychological moralists, has constantly throughout his work shown how largely the advances of morality have been due to the growth of this effort after impartiality in ethical judgement. To aim at impartiality is to aim at objectivity. An ethical judgement claims objectivity just so far as it pretends to impartiality: it is entitled to make this claim just so far as it succeeds in achieving it. An impartial judgement means a judgement based upon some rational consideration which must appeal to every rational being just so far as he is rational.

(4) What I have said about impartiality naturally leads us to the idea of



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consistency. One of the ways in which the conviction that moral judgements are objective betrays itself is in the requirement that our moral judgements should be consistent with each other. At a tolerably early stage in the development of morals this demand is undoubtedly made to some extent. It is assumed that, if I condemn a certain act to-day, I ought to condemn a precisely similar act to-morrow; or again (at a slightly more advanced stage), that, if I condemn the stealing of money, I ought to condemn the stealing of cattle, or the stealing of books, and so on. Moral progress has consisted very largely in the gradual rationalizing of the inconsistencies involved in merely customary or merely emotional morality. The conviction that slavery was



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wrong was brought about not only by the growth of humanity, but also by a demand for intellectual consistency. It was felt to be unreasonable to approve of treating the black man as a mere means to an end when such conduct was condemned toward a white man, unless some relevant difference could be pointed out between the two cases. Defenders of slavery for a time attempted to point out such differences, but it was gradually seen that the differences were either non-existent or irrelevant. An American court has even, as is well known, been driven by the desire to escape this logical difficulty into actually deciding that the term "man" does not include "negro." It is obvious that there can be no need for such consistency of moral judgement



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about a mere matter of emotion. In that case, the fact that a white man actually sympathized with other white men more than with black men would have been a final reply to the demand of the Abolitionist. On the emotionalist hypothesis, it would be unreasonable to demand even that my judgement should be the same for two days together. Emotional moods vary: and if either an individual or a community were angry with a certain piece of conduct to-day and not angry with precisely similar conduct to-morrow, nobody would have any right to reproach them with inconsistency. We do actually *tend* to be inconsistent in our judgements, but there is something in us which condemns that inconsistency, and that something can only be the rational element of our na-



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ture. This demand for consistency was not altogether absent from primitive systems either of law or of morality; and it has grown with the general growth in the power of abstract thinking.

I have spoken of a gradual transition from emotional to rational morality. But it must not be supposed that morality can ever become purely rational. No action can be done which does not satisfy some desire: that has hardly been seriously denied by ethical Rationalists, though pages and pages have been written by their opponents to establish this obvious fact. And the question how much any given individual does actually comply with the requirements of the moral law depends quite as much upon the relative strength of his various desires as upon the clearness



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and correctness of his intellectual judgments. The question at issue between Rationalists and Emotionalists is not what impels me to do a virtuous act, but how I know it to be virtuous. And even when we ask why this or that person thinks this or that act right, the answer will be very often that he is determined to think so partly by custom, partly by emotion:[1] but even in these cases the intellectual notion of right and wrong is present, and may strengthen whatever other motives might otherwise impel him to choose one course of action rather than another. There is such a thing as (to use Sidgwick's expression) the desire to do what is right

[1] I might add, "partly by deference to authority," but authority, so far as it can be distinguished from custom, always implies the judgement of some other mind in the background.



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and reasonable as such. But the extent to which this motive actually operates in the life of even the best men has been enormously exaggerated by most Rationalists. Nor is it even morally desirable that this motive should be the dominant one. Indeed, we may even say it ought not to be the *sole* motive of any single moral action. For in our most deliberately rational moments we do not deny all value to all the things which we naturally and spontaneously desire — to our own happiness, to other people's happiness, to knowledge, to the contemplation of beauty. On the contrary, we cannot regard anything as good which is not capable of being desired. Every rational act ought, therefore, to be directed toward the realization of some good other than the good



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will, however true it may be that the good will possesses a higher value than anything else in the world. Reason, and the desire to obey Reason, actually operate not so much by substituting themselves for other desires or motives as by selecting among the desires those which have most value—suppressing this one, subordinating that one, comparing one desired end with another, turning the confused and alternating chaos of natural desires into an ordered hierarchy, combining them into a settled plan or ideal of life, building up out of the numerous ends which we desire a single end which we pursue for ourselves and for others as *the* end of human life.

This is the ideal task of Reason. And Reason does something of this work in



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the inner life probably of most adults in modern civilized countries. But we must undoubtedly recognize the fact that we have in a modern community, living side by side, individuals who are at very different stages both of intellectual and of moral development. The morality of many is almost wholly customary: the morality of many others is mainly emotional. Even when the sense of duty is fully and strongly developed, most men are very largely dependent upon custom and authority on the one hand, and upon emotion on the other, for the determination of the particular acts which shall be accounted moral. We may have a morality of a very high order in which (nevertheless) there is little direct and conscious reflection upon the details of duty. The moral value of



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a motive is not dependent upon the abstractness or self-consciousness with which the desire to act rationally operates. A motive may be pronounced by Reason to possess the highest value, although the individual agent may not himself have consciously thought much about being rational. Reason, for instance, recognizes that the enthusiasm of humanity is the highest of motives and may therefore acknowledge the sainthood of a St. Francis of Assisi, although St. Francis personally was probably more influenced by his emotions than by his reason. It was probably by a vague consciousness that the love of mankind, and of the ideal Man Jesus Christ, is a higher motive than self-love that the practical Reason controlled the life of St. Francis: and in



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that sense of something intrinsically higher there was operative the same sense of duty which, in a more abstract and intellectual form, dominated the life of a Socrates or a Kant. Doubtless there were defects in his morality, which a more reflective and rational ideal might have avoided. On the other hand, neither Reason nor the desire to act rationally can be satisfactory substitutes for emotion. The practical morality of a man like Kant was as defective on one side as that of St. Francis was on another. A more rational morality would, perhaps, have induced St. Francis to recognize that he had no right to give away his father's property to the poor; that cleanliness is not necessarily inconsistent with godliness; and that it is better to take care of one's health and live to



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the age of seventy than to neglect it and die at forty-five. A more emotional morality might have led Kant to visit his crazy sister as well as to support her pecuniarily out of respect for the Categorical Imperative. And even in Kant himself it is easy to see that, with all his parade of Rationalism, he was mainly dependent upon custom and tradition for his views as to what detailed kinds of conduct were moral or immoral.

Moreover, it must be remembered that the Reason which operates in the moral life of mankind is not always that of the individual moral agent himself. Very often it is the diffused Reason of the community which expresses itself in his ethical judgements. But there is one sense in which all higher morality —though not necessarily that of the very



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young child or that of the very primitive savage — is essentially rational. We can always detect in it that concept of the right or the good (no matter what the detailed acts or ends to which it is applied) which cannot be resolved into any kind of emotion, or fusion of emotions, which cannot be derived from experience, which is not a mere *vox nihili* standing for nothing but confusion and delusion in the mind of him who thinks that he knows what it means, but an ultimate, unanalysable notion or category of human thought — as much so as the notion of quantity or of quality, of causality or of substance.

That the notion of an intrinsic right and wrong — an intrinsically higher and lower conduct or character really dominates the ideas of those who in their



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speculative moments most strenuously deny their validity — could be abundantly illustrated from their own writings. Professer Westermarck, though he is generous to the savage and perhaps underrates the difference between his morality and ours, never exhibits the slightest real doubt that his own ideal of life, when it is different from that of the savage, is the higher of the two, though his system entirely fails to supply any intelligible meaning for such an assertion.

I will give a few illustrations of this fact. In one place he is speaking of savage ideas of chastity. The tendency, he tells us, is to treat acts of unchastity only as wrongs done to the parents or family of the girl, and he continues: "Now to anybody who duly reflects



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upon the matter it is clear that the seducer does a wrong to the woman also; but I find no indication that this idea occurs at all to the savage mind."[1] Professor Westermarck clearly thinks that the savage is wrong, and that his own attitude toward the matter is the truer or higher attitude; and yet it requires some reflection and intellectual activity — and not merely emotion — to reach that attitude. If it were merely a difference of emotion, what right has he to assume that, because the savage's emotions are different from his own, they are therefore "lower"? It may be that, if the savage were to reflect, emotions of approbation might be excited which otherwise would not be excited; but,

[1] *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, vol. II, p. 437.



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then, why should he assume that it is a duty to reflect, or that the emotions of the reflective are higher or truer than those of the unreflective? In one place he actually talks about emotions depending upon cognition as "higher emotions."[1] He speaks again of traditional notions being accepted by the majority of people without further reflection; and declares that "by tracing them to their source it will be found that not a few of these notions have their origin in sentimental likings and antipathies, to which a scrutinising and enlightened judge can attach little importance."[2] But, according to Professor Westermarck, all moral distinctions are based simply upon sentimental likings and antipa-

[1] *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, vol. II, p. 744. [2] *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 3.



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thies. If so, what has enlightenment or unenlightenment to do with the matter? Obviously the Professor here betrays the fact that he thinks there are some emotions which it is reasonable to feel and others which it is unreasonable to feel, or, at all events, unreasonable to act upon; the "importance" of which he speaks implies precisely that notion of objective validity or value the existence of which he disputes. Again, at the end of his chapter on "the emotional origin of moral judgements," he exclaims, "Could it be brought home to people that there is no absolute standard in morality, they would perhaps be somewhat more tolerant in their judgements and more apt to listen to the voice of reason."[1]

[1] *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, vol. 1, p. 20.



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"The voice of reason," forsooth, when the whole chapter is a diatribe against the notion that Reason has anything to say about conduct! Reason might no doubt on his premises explode the notion of an absolute standard, and the Reason which did so would of course not be the moral Reason. But the Professor clearly means to imply that to be intolerant when one's judgements have no objective validity would be unreasonable. Why so, if I actually do feel intolerant toward those whose sentimental likings and dislikings happen to differ from mine? I could hardly imagine a clearer betrayal of the fact that in Professor Westermarck's mind, as in other people's, some sorts of conduct are looked upon not merely as provocative of disapprobation in certain persons, but as



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the object of judgements which are intellectually valid. The very denial that some acts conventionally immoral are rationally condemned carries with it the implication that other acts may be rationally condemned and pronounced immoral.

Let me add that, although it is easy to see that high-minded philosophers of the emotional school are really affected by the concept of which they deny the validity, I am far from suggesting that their denial of validity to such conceptions has no practical consequences. On the contrary, I believe that to deny the validity of the idea of duty has a strong tendency to impair its practical influence on the individual's life. And therefore I hold it to be a matter of great practical as well as intellectual import-



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ance that the emotional theory of morality should be rejected. A morality which describes itself, as it does in the title of a celebrated book of M. Guyau, as "Une morale sans obligation ni sanction," is very likely indeed to prove in actual life a morality which is not particularly exalted in theory, and which is usually disobeyed in practice.

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## NOTE ON DR. McDOUGALL'S TREATMENT OF RATIONALISTIC ETHICS

In "An Introduction to Social Psychology" (the sixth edition of which has just appeared) Mr. McDougall does me the honor to criticise me as a representative of rationalistic Ethics. I should like to make a few remarks on his treatment of the subject.

(1) He begins his note by saying (p. 229), "This hypothesis [that our moral ideas are the work of Reason] is still maintained by some modern writers of repute," as though the posi-



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tion were unusual and obsolete. It would probably be useless to mention as authorities by whom that view is maintained, such writers as Green,[1] the two Cairds, Edouard von Hartmann, Renouvier, or Henry Sidgwick, for these writers, being dead, would presumably be treated as belonging to the hopelessly benighted past of moral philosophy as unquestionably as Plato or Kant or Hegel. But, lest some younger reader of Mr. McDougall's book should suppose that the view is one with which he need not trouble himself, I may perhaps point to the fact that it is shared by the most eminent living representatives of English and American philosophy, and in fact by a considerable majority of the official teachers of philosophy in England, including those of Mr. McDougall's own university — men like Mr. Bradley, Professor Bosanquet, Professor Royce, Professor A. E. Taylor, Sir Henry Jones, Professor Pringle-Pattison, Professor James Seth, Lord Haldane, Professor Mackenzie, Professor Muirhead, Dr. McTaggart, Professor J. A. Smith, Mr. Prichard, Mr. Clement Webb, the

[1] I am surprised to find that Mr. McDougall appeals to Green in support of his views.



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Hon. Bertrand Russell, and Mr. G. E. Moore. I am prevented from adding other well-known names which probably ought to be included by the fact that they have not written upon ethics, though from the general trend of their philosophical opinions they might be presumed to hold the view in question. Nor can the doctrine be accounted for by the fact that professors of philosophy are not always equally well acquainted with the most recent developments of psychology. Professor Münsterberg, Professor L. T. Hobhouse, Prof. James Ward, and Prof. Stout believe in the rational or intellectual nature, and consequently the objective validity, of our moral judgements as strongly as any of the writers who are mainly known as metaphysicians. I submit that in view of such a list of names Mr. McDougall, though, of course, entitled to dissent, is not justified in assuming the somewhat contemptuous tone which he adopts in speaking of my views.

(2) Mr. McDougall goes on to say that I regard the moral consciousness "in the same way as Kantians regard our faculties of perceiving spatial and temporal relations, namely, as one



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which, though it may be developed and refined by use, is given *a priori* as a primary faculty of intuition, one not evolved from more elementary forms of judgment"; and continues, "he makes no attempt to justify this assumption, on which he hangs so great a weight of consequences." I do not quite recognize the first sentence as a correct account of my position, as it suggests that I do not think that the moral consciousness has been gradually evolved, but I will not dwell upon this. What I wish to object to is the statement that I have made no attempt to justify my position. The fact is I find it difficult to say what part of my "Theory of Good and Evil" is not an attempt to argue in defense of this position. The chapter on "Rationalistic Utilitarianism" (vol. 1, pp. 44–76) states Sidgwick's position, and argues in defense of it so far as it involves the existence and validity of *a priori* or immediate ethical judgements. The chapter on "The Categorical Imperative" (vol. 1, pp. 102–37) is an attempt to defend the rationalistic position of Kant, while rejecting some of the consequences which Kant deduced from that position. The chapter on "Reason



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and Feeling" (vol. I, pp. 139–77) is entirely devoted to an argument in favor of the belief that our moral judgements are rational and to a refutation of the rival theory that they are feelings or emotions. Book II, chapter III, on "Self-Realization and Self-Sacrifice" (II, pp. 61–103), defends the validity of our moral judgements against writers who, while not denying the intellectual character, or even in a sense the objective validity, of the conception of Good, deny the absolute or cosmic validity of our human moral judgements in detail. In book III, chapter I ("Metaphysic and Morality," vol. II, pp. 189–246), is contained *inter alia* a reply to the objections made to the rationalistic position so far as they are based on metaphysic. Chapter IV (pp. 356–413) is a reply to Professor Herbert Spencer's attempt to supply a purely evolutionary explanation of our moral judgements, this being the best-known of the attempts to expound something like Mr. McDougall's own position before the appearance of Professor Westermarck's book and his own. My arguments may not appeal to Mr. McDougall, but they are certainly there. However weak an opponent's



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arguments may seem to his critic, it is scarcely a legitimate controversial device to deny their existence. From the nature of the case, the arguments consist very largely in the refutation of rival and inconsistent theories. If Mr. McDougall thinks my references too vague, I will especially direct his attention to the following passages: vol. I, pp. 90–91, 102–06, 140–49, 164–68; vol. II, pp. 189–95, 229, 356–75, 391–93.

(3) Mr. McDougall goes on to remark: "Curiously enough, while the Kantian view of our faculties of spatial and temporal judgement is held to imply that such judgements have no objective value, space and time being purely subjective, Dr. Rashdall finds in the assured *a priori* character of moral judgements and the moral consciousness his one source of confidence in the objectivity of such judgements." I venture to point out that this criticism implies a total misconception of the whole Kantian philosophy. It seems to imply that Kant denied objective validity to all *a priori* judgements. Now Kant distinctly held that all the categories possess objective validity: they are valid even as regards things-in-themselves. But *we* have no experi-



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ence which goes beyond phenomena: consequently we do not know how to apply categories to noumena. The category of causality, for instance, is perfectly valid even as regards noumena; but the only experience to which we can apply it is an experience which comes to us under the forms of space and time. Consequently *for us* a cause must be an event antecedent in time to its effect, and therefore *we* can only know phenomenal causes. But Kant never denied that the category of causality was valid even in the world of noumena. I need not add that it was just because he supposed (however strangely) that our moral judgements do not relate to anything temporal, that he held that the limitations of the speculative Reason do not affect the absolute objective validity of the judgements given by the practical Reason: and this objective validity of the judgements of practical Reason constituted a validation even of the speculative "ideas" which can be shown to be postulates of the practical Reason.

(4) In the only passage in which Mr. McDougall attempts any serious reply to the position of which he regards me as the representative, he



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writes, "When authors tell us that 'reason' is the principle of moral action, it is necessary to point out that the function of reason is merely to deduce new propositions from propositions already accepted." (L. c., pp. 378–9.)

Mr. McDougall appears to expect us to accept, on the strength of his mere *ipse dixit*, a proposition which would be contradicted not only by all modern idealists, but by all logicians and metaphysicians who have learned anything at all from Kant. By Reason, of course, those who believe that our moral judgements are the work of Reason do not mean merely the faculty of drawing inferences, but the faculty of apprehending *a priori* or immediately those axiomatic truths upon which in the last resort all knowledge depends.[1] They hold that our moral judgements are due to a distinguishable activity of the same rational Self or Mind or Soul (Mr. McDougall at least will not object to my use of

[1] Kant and others would refer such judgements to "the Understanding," but I am not, and was not in my book, dealing with the question of the distinction between one intellectual faculty and another. The question is whether moral judgements are the work of the Intellect.



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the last term) to which is due our judgement that two and two make four and that "two straight lines cannot enclose a space." This position may be false, but it cannot be disposed of by a mere denial. Further controversy on the subject would, however, be unprofitable until Mr. McDougall tells how he supposes our knowledge of such principles is obtained. For the position that such judgements are seen to be true immediately by the Reason or intellect a much longer list of authorities might be quoted than that given above for the rationalistic character of our moral judgements. In fact, apart from the Pragmatists, few logicians of the present day would deny it.

(5) Mr. McDougall appears to include me among those who believe in a moral "faculty which seems to be conceived as having been implanted in the human mind by a special act of the Creator, rather than as being the product of the slow processes of evolution" (p. 378). I have over and over again in the course of my book ("The Theory of Good and Evil," Oxford, 1907) asserted that the moral faculty is the result of slow development just in whatever sense all our other intellectual faculties or (if that phrase is objected



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to) capacities are the result of evolution. I will quote only one of these statements: "In the present state of ethical thought it will be perhaps unnecessary further to labor the point that our moral ideas are gradually developed in exactly the same sense, and in exactly the same way, as any other capacities of the human soul, and that this forms no more reason for doubting their validity than in the parallel case of the multiplication table" (l. c., vol. II, p. 357). He then tries to dispose of this position by saying, "All these doctrines are open to two very serious objections: (1) that they are incompatible with the principle of the continuity of evolution; (2) that they are forms of the 'faculty doctrine' whose fallacies has been so often exposed" (p. 378). It is difficult to meet such a vague and dogmatic attack until we know a little more what Mr. McDougall supposes to be involved in these two principles—"continuity of evolution," denial of the "faculty doctrine." As to the first I should not deny the continuity of evolution if by that is meant that the human mind has reached its present stage by a slow process of development, just as the individual child who is rational only po-



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tentially or *propter spem* grows into a fully developed rational man by slow stages. If, however, the formula means that there is nothing in the higher stages of mental development which was not present in the lower, that for instance the idea of logical connexion present in the mind of an adult human being is exactly the same as anything which was present in the mind of a toad, I can only say that such a view is opposed to the general view of psychologists — including (I imagine) that of Mr. McDougall himself. Intellectual evolution certainly involves the appearance of a constant succession of new mental events which have not appeared before, and (in its higher stages) of concepts which are not present at all in the lower stages. If it is admitted that ideas which were once non-existent in the mind of an animal come in time to be present in their posterity — if that involves no denial of the "continuity of evolution," neither do I deny it when I say the same thing of the idea of "duty" or of "good." There is a "special act of the Creator" in the one case as much or as little as in the other. Exactly the same principle holds of the "faculty doctrine." By a



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faculty I mean (as I have explained in my book) nothing but a "capacity." It can hardly be denied that, if we do give moral judgements, we have a capacity for giving them. To hold that men or animals who once did not and could not give such judgements have come to be capable of giving them no more involves "the faculty doctrine" (in any sense in which most modern psychologists reject it) than to hold that monkeys have no capacity for apprehending the differential calculus, but that men have such a capacity involves a like error. Perhaps we might reach a clearer issue and avoid the prejudice which any allusion to "Reason" or "moral faculties" excites in some minds by stating my position in the form that moral judgements are a kind of thinking, not a kind of emotion or feeling or desire, however closely they may be connected with all three.

(6) The only passage in which Mr. McDougall has come to close quarters with any position which I have really maintained is in his attack (p. 379) on my view that a desire to do the right action "may be created by the Reason which recognizes the rightness." In reply he says: "To



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create desire is a task beyond its [Reason's] competence; it can only direct pre-existing tendencies toward their appropriate objects." Yet even here we are presented with dogma rather than with argument. Of course it is in a sense true that there must be a "pre-existing tendency" toward an appropriate object before a man can desire to do right, just as there must be a "pre-existing tendency" toward the desire to solve mathematical problems (whether in the race or in the individual) or these problems will not be solved; but until the Reason or (as perhaps Mr. McDougall would prefer to say) the Intellect possesses the idea (say) of an isosceles triangle, it will feel no desire to solve the problem of the equality or inequality of the angles at the base of such a triangle. If the desire to know whether those angles are equal or unequal springs up subsequently to, and in consequence of, the intellect's apprehension of the idea of an isosceles triangle and of the problem about the equality of its angles, would there be any harm in saying that the Reason creates the desire to solve the problem? Of course Reason would not create a desire in a mind that was all Reason and nothing



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else, that had not desires or at least a capacity for acquiring such desires. I only assert that the desire to do right is created by the intellect in the sense that the desire to solve a problem is created by the intellect when it apprehends the nature of the problem. The desire to do right presupposes the idea of right just as the desire to solve the problem presupposes an intellectual apprehension of the problem. What is denied is simply that any other desire *need* be present except the desire to do right. I do not deny that in the majority of cases the desire to do right is not the sole motive which prompts to the doing of the right action when it is actually done. Against the view which is here set forth Mr. McDougall brings no arguments at all.

In conclusion, I should like to say that I have a great respect for Mr. McDougall's psychological work, but his whole treatment of this question of Reason and Feeling in ethics shows that he fails to understand the position really taken up by ethical Rationalists. His mind is so obsessed by the prejudice that any form of that doctrine implies some philosophical bogy of "special creation" or an "implanted faculty"



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or a "deus ex machina," or the like, that he is really incapable of stating the position fairly — still less of arguing against it in a way that can bring any conviction to the people who know, or think they know, what it means.

Perhaps the best way of disabusing Mr. McDougall's mind of the prepossession that my views on this matter are inspired by some antiquated theological dogma will be to point out that they are shared by such completely anti-theological moralists as Mr. Bertrand Russell and Mr. G. E. Moore.

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# III

## VALUE OR SATISFACTION?

In my previous lectures I have tried to show you that there is such a thing as a judgement of value — a distinct intellectual act by which we pronounce something good or bad. This implies that we have a distinct concept of good or value — as distinct, as incapable of being defined or of being analysed away into anything else, as the idea of cause or the idea of quantity. In the present lecture I shall endeavor to examine a little further the nature of this concept; and I trust that in doing so I shall be able to go farther than I have hitherto done in the direction of admitting ele-



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ments of truth in the opposite or emotional view of ethics, and may hope to render the rationalistic position a little more intelligible and more acceptable to those who may have been more or less disposed to acquiesce in the emotional theory.

No writer has done so much to emphasize the ultimate, unanalysable, *sui generis* character of the value-judgement as Mr. G. E. Moore, of Trinity College, Cambridge. "If I am asked, 'What is good?'" he says, "my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked, 'How is good to be defined?' my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it. But disappointing as these answers may appear, they are of the very last im-



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portance. For readers who are familiar with philosophic terminology, I can express their importance by saying that they amount to this: That propositions about the good are all of them synthetic and never analytic; and that is plainly no trivial matter. And the same thing may be expressed more popularly, by saying that if I am right, then nobody can foist upon me such an axiom as that 'Pleasure is the only good,' or that 'The good is the desired,' on the pretence that this is 'the very meaning of the word.'"[1]

Mr. Moore does not, of course, deny that you can set forth in detail the things that are good. What he means is that if you say, for instance, "Pleasure is good," you mean something more than

[1] *Principia Ethica*, pp. 6, 7.



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that pleasure is pleasant, and that that something is not expressible in any language which does not contain the word "good" or some synonym of it. That would equally be the case even if you were right in saying, "All pleasure is good and nothing but pleasure is good." The only way of escaping this admission is to say that good is simply a word without meaning. And in view of the fact that all languages provide a word for the idea, and that such propositions as the above are constantly enunciated as if they had a meaning and were not mere identical propositions, this is a view that I find it difficult to accept. For a full statement and defence of the position that the term "good" is indefinable, and for a full exposure of the fallacies implied in denying it, I must



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refer you to Mr. Moore's brilliant and extremely important work. I should like to quote more of it, but time will not allow.

I fully and heartily accept Mr. Moore's position. At the same time I feel that there is something more to be said. The moral judgement is not a mere emotion, but it is impossible to deny that it is very closely connected with the emotional side of our nature, and it is of great importance to determine as clearly as possible the nature of that connexion. It is only in that way that we can hope to make the rationalistic position satisfactory, or even intelligible, to minds which are inclined to the emotionalist view. Now, in the first place, most Rationalists will readily admit that



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an ethical judgement is normally (at least when it relates to some important practical issue actually arising in our own experience) accompanied by a certain amount of emotion — all the more so in proportion as the judgement calls for and actually inspires action on our own part in the face of some serious temptation or conflicting desire.[1] We need not for the present purpose ask whether there is any one specific *moral* emotion, or whether (as I should myself be inclined to say) the emotional accompaniments of our ethical judgements vary with different individuals and different kinds of right- and wrong-doing. It is enough to say that emotion of one

[1] These qualifications are sometimes ignored. An abstract ethical judgement that theft is wrong or that A. B. convicted at the police court last Thursday, did wrong frequently involves no emotion at all.



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kind or another — I do not say necessarily but normally — accompanies the giving of moral judgements in actual concrete cases.

This will be generally admitted, and it helps to explain the strong tendency to confuse approbation and disapprobation with emotion. But it will not go far towards satisfying the demands of those who feel attracted to the emotionalist position. We shall go a step nearer to admitting an element of truth in this theory when we insist that in some cases the judgement is and ought to be actually affected by the emotions — emotions excited by the contemplation of certain kinds of conduct. I must remind you once more of the all-important fact that the thing which we pronounce to be good or to possess value is always



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some kind of conscious experience.[1] And conscious experience always has a feeling side to it. In the case of the most commonplace moral judgements the ground on which they rest is simply the pleasure or pain which is caused by the act approved or condemned. Any one of the more elementary moral rules — the rules which forbid various forms of injury to others — are sufficiently explained and justified by the judgement that pain is bad. I do not think that the pleasure-pain side of a conscious experience is the only element which we take into consideration in

[1] Mr. Moore suggests that some low degree of value may be possessed by unconscious things apart altogether from the effect produced upon consciousness. This is a position which I cannot understand, and I believe Mr. Moore has since modified his view upon this point.



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pronouncing on its value. That is the mistake of hedonism. But it is certainly one of the elements on which its value depends, and in the case of such elementary rules as we are considering, it is the only one that need be taken account of. In other cases the ground of our judgement is adequately explained by saying that we judge one pleasure to be intrinsically *higher* than another. And among the pleasures which we pronounce to have a value much higher than the value which they possess when considered merely as so much pleasure are various emotional experiences. We judge the pleasures of family affection to be more valuable than the pleasures of eating and drinking, and on that ground (among others) should condemn the adoption of infanticide as a means



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of reducing a population which threatened to outgrow the food-supply. Emotion of certain kinds is one of the things which possess value. But further I think we may even say that in some cases the emotional repugnance which an act inspires is the *sole* ground for our condemnation of it. Thus we in a quasi-instinctive way condemn cannibalism and uncleanliness, though in some cases [1] no further evil follows from them beyond the cultivation of one kind of emotional disposition and the repression of another. Possibly the condemnation of some forms of sexual immorality or indecency may be brought within this category. You will observe that even

[1] In the case of cannibalism I am assuming that the man is not killed solely for the purpose of being eaten.



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in these cases the judgement that the emotions which are excited by the conduct possess a certain value, and should be cultivated, is something quite distinguishable from the emotion itself. Many kinds of conduct *prima facie* excite a closely analogous repulsion — the practice of dissection, the dirty work connected with many trades or with scientific research, and the like. But here, when once the purpose of the proceeding is understood, it is recognized that the squeamishness which rebels against them is merely physical, and should be lived down. In the case of cannibalism or useless uncleanliness, on the other hand, we judge that the emotional disgust which the conduct excites is one which ought to be encouraged, that to lose this dislike (as we should do by



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practising or tolerating the conduct) would be to lose something valuable, and, on the other hand, that the emotions gratified and cultivated by the opposite kind of conduct possess an intrinsic value.

By this time it is probable that an emotionalist opponent will be thinking that we have very nearly come round to the admission that after all the so-called judgement of value is only a kind of satisfaction which accompanies certain kinds of experience. If he is not a hedonist, he may readily allow that the satisfactoriness of an experience to a rational being does not depend upon its mere pleasurableness. We are so constituted, it may be suggested, as to find very often more satisfaction in occupations which involve much toil or even



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pain than in those which bring with them a succession of unalloyed pleasures. Even sport has been defined as the overcoming of difficulties simply for the sake of overcoming them, and sport frequently involves an element of danger or of pain. Unselfish people get more satisfaction from giving pleasure to others in laborious and disagreeable ways than from enjoying it themselves. To men of heroic mould the extremest self-sacrifice in the pursuit of an ideal seems, in and for itself, a more satisfactory experience than the enjoyment of some terrestrial or celestial paradise, though it is a very hazardous assumption to suppose that they get more pleasure from it. And yet in all these cases the meaning of the good, it may be contended, is at bottom simply that



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which satisfies desire. We have desires for many things besides pleasure, and therefore the good is by no means identical with the pleasant. There may be many different kinds of satisfaction, or at least, we are satisfied with many different kinds of things. But still the meaning of the judgement "This experience is good," is after all, it may be contended, only "This satisfies somebody or other."

Such is substantially the view of Ethics adopted by the late Professor William James, and I suppose by most Pragmatists. And a strong tendency towards this point of view is frequently discoverable in writers who are otherwise Rationalists of the very straitest sort. Professor Bosanquet, for instance, has expressly identified the good with



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satisfactory experience, though he would no doubt be less willing than less rationalistic writers to explain the "satisfactory" as simply that which satisfies any and every sort of desire. But at present I will confine myself to William James, who has at least the merit of being perfectly clear and explicit. This doctrine that the good is the satisfactory is not exactly the same as that of the writers whom we examined last time but it is sufficiently like it to justify its consideration in these lectures. It may be described as another form of the emotional view, and is equally opposed to the rationalistic position for which I am contending. And the best way of meeting it will be to show you how impossible the writers who hold it find it to avoid in-



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troducing into their notion of satisfaction an element which really admits that intellectual concept of the good which they profess to deny.

William James definitely lays it down that "*the essence of good is simply to satisfy demand.*"[1] Anything and everything which satisfies any sort of demand of anybody is good. But a very little reflection shows that not all demands can be satisfied. One man's demands can often only be satisfied at the expense of the non-satisfaction of another's; the demands of one part of my nature or one moment of my existence can only be satisfied by leaving unsatisfied another side of my nature or other moments of my conscious life. And William James admits that the philosopher

[1] *The Will to Believe*, p. 201.



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—and therefore presumably the ordinary man in proportion as he is influenced by the philosopher's desire to be rational and consistent—feels a demand for some principle by which he can determine which of these conflicting desires shall be satisfied, and which shall not. And James attempts to provide him with such a criterion: —

"Since everything which is demanded is by that fact a good, must not the guiding principle for ethical philosophy (since all demands conjointly cannot be satisfied in this poor world) be simply to satisfy at all times *as many demands as we can?* That act must be best, accordingly, which makes for the *best whole*, in the sense of awakening the least sum of dissatisfactions. In the casuistic scale, therefore, those ideals



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must be written highest which *prevail at the least cost*, or by whose realization the least possible number of other ideals are destroyed. Since victory and defeat there must be, the victory to be philosophically prayed for is that of the more inclusive side — of the side which even in the hour of triumph will to some degree do justice to the ideals in which the vanquished party's interests lie."[1]

Now it seems to me that William James here betrays in an almost naïve manner the fact that, even though he may think that everything which is desired is good, he does not mean by "good" simply the fact that it is desired. He recognizes that the philosopher has an "ideal of objectivity" (that is his own expression) in matters of

[1] *The Will to Believe*, p. 205.



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conduct. He assumes, indeed, that he will exhibit this concern for objectivity by simply treating one desire as equally entitled to satisfaction with every other, irrespective of what desire it is. The goodness of an experience is to be measured by the extent to which it satisfies desire. We may doubt whether that is exactly the verdict which the philosopher, or the thoughtful good man who attempts to act upon this ideal of objectivity, will actually pronounce; but let us assume for the moment that he will accept Professor James's interpretation of objectivity, and let us see what this implies. It implies that he thinks some desires ought not to be gratified because they are inconsistent with the satisfaction of other desires. The philosopher, then, — and



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I presume I may add every other rational man in proportion as he is rational, — demands intellectual impartiality in conduct. And, in proportion as he lives up to his own ideal, he is prepared to doom to non-satisfaction some of his own desires for the sake of this ideal. From what part of his nature, then, does this demand for impartiality arise? Surely it can only be from his intellect. Mere desire *qua* desire cares nothing for impartiality. *Qua* appetitive being, I shall only satisfy desires in proportion as I feel them, and it constantly happens that I do in fact desire things which I can only attain at the cost of a quite incommensurate dissatisfaction on the part of many other persons; and even if you allow for the play of altruistic impulses, I am much more inter-



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ested in one individual or small group of individuals than in thousands of others who are known to me merely as human beings enumerated in the census. It is only my Reason which objects to such partiality. There is no desire in me which forbids me to gratify this spontaneous preference for myself, my family, or my friends except the desire to be rational. And the fact that I have a desire to be rational implies that I already have the notion that impartial conduct really and intrinsically *is* more rational than partial conduct — the conduct which satisfies thousands of human beings rather than the conduct which satisfies one or a few. That seems to me practically to admit the existence of some such self-evident rational judgements as these — "More satisfaction



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is always better than less satisfaction," no matter whose satisfaction it is, or "One man's satisfaction is as valuable as the like satisfaction of another." Emotionally this is certainly not what we feel. As subjects of mere natural spontaneous emotion, one man's or one woman's satisfaction may be more to us than that of a thousand others. And yet there is something in the intellect which protests against acquiescence in the view that thousands should be sacrificed to one. Once more, in analysing the moral consciousness of Professor James as in analysing that of the savage, we discover in the sense of justice the element of morality which most peremptorily refuses to be explained away into mere desire or mere emotion.

No doubt Professor James might plead



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that I shall not in practice be influenced by this judgement except in so far as it satisfies some demand of my own. That is quite true; but the demand is simply the demand of my rational nature, not of any other part of me. Thus it is practically admitted by Professor James that, even though everything be good in proportion as it is desired or demanded, the word "good" does not *mean* merely the fact that it is demanded. If by "demanded" you mean merely that which I personally happen to want, then I should not acknowledge that that which satisfies the demands of thousands is better than that which satisfies the demands of one. If you say, "That which *any one* demands is good, and that is all that is meant by calling it good," then, so long



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as you stick to your definition of good, I might intellectually recognize that what thousands demand is good, but that would constitute no motive for my choosing this course which others demand. Others demand it (you tell me): I recognize the fact; and that (you say) is all you mean by calling it good. But *I* do not demand it: why should I care about the demands of others? If in point of fact I do recognize that other people's desiring it constitutes a reason why I should promote the satisfaction of the demand, that implies that to recognize a thing to be good is more than to recognize that it is desired. It implies in fact that it is something which presents itself to my rational nature as that which *ought* to be desired, whether in point of fact I do desire it or not. Thus the



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inexpugnable idea of "oughtness" reveals itself beneath all the phrases which have been carefully constructed to conceal it. That interest in an abstract, objective, greatest quantum of satisfaction which James admits that some men at least possess, implies the existence of that objectivity in the notion of good which the emotional theory, as is admitted by more consistent theorists, entirely undermines. That is so even if we assume with William James that the fact of a thing being desired stamps it as *pro tanto* good. But I do not think it will be difficult to show that the actual moral consciousness does not always recognize that the mere fact that a thing is desired implies that it is good, or at all events that the measure in which it is actually desired is the measure of its goodness.



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The best way of doing this will be to point out how different is the actual behaviour of men whom we are agreed in calling good to that which would naturally and logically result from the identification of the good with the actually desired. In the first place, the good man does not really make his conduct towards others turn upon the satisfactoriness to the individual of that individual's own personal experiences. When he judges that an experience of another man is bad,— say, for instance, the experience of getting drunk, which is eminently satisfactory to some people,— he will try to prevent that other person having that experience, without calculating how far the experience of sobriety will actually be satisfactory to the drunkard. You will suggest, per-



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haps, that what he says to himself is, "I object to your satisfying yourself by getting drunk, because such satisfaction dissatisfies me." That explanation of the good man's desire to prevent another getting drunk (not in his presence but in a way which can inflict no physical or emotional discomfort upon him) involves the same fallacy — the same *hysteron-proteron*, as it has been called, — as the ordinary doctrine of the old hedonistic psychology, the doctrine that what is desired is always the agent's own pleasure. No doubt if I already desire that another man should be sober, it will be satisfactory to me to prevent his getting drunk, but not otherwise: therefore you can't account for my interest in the matter by saying that I stop his getting drunk because it causes



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*me* dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction implies a condemnation which is not based on the dissatisfaction. Or do you admit that there is a *disinterested* desire of the other man's satisfactions? But if all I meant by "good" were actual satisfaction, I should surely accept the other man's verdict as to what is satisfactory to him and what is not. What can be more arbitrary, if what I aim at is another's satisfaction, than to insist on his satisfying himself with what satisfies me? It is plain that, so far as the good man's notion of good can be identified with satisfactoriness, it is what is satisfactory to an ideal self, not to any particular actual self that he identifies with the good. And that implies an objective standard of good which cannot be got out of mere emotion, or out of any



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mere feeling of satisfactoriness, unless by satisfactory you mean satisfactory to this idealizing part of the man — in other words to that moral consciousness which is part of his nature as a rational being.

You may suggest that, since we all partake in one human nature, the man who finds, say, the pleasure of sin ultimately unsatisfactory, has a right to assume that in the long run it will be found to be so to others. Certainly that is so if Reason has got anything to do with the estimate of what is satisfactory, for Reason is objective in its deliverances: I may therefore assume that the other man's rational nature will condemn what my rational nature condemns, when once it is roused into activity: just as I assume that when I see a geometrical proposi-



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tion to be demonstrated, another man who does not see it, could still be got to see it with sufficient explanation on my part and sufficient attention on his. But if by "satisfaction" you mean simply what satisfies the man as he is, it is a ridiculous assumption to suppose that what will satisfy me will satisfy another. Reason is the same in all men: tastes proverbially differ. The identification of the good with the satisfactory reduces diversities of moral judgement to differences of taste quite as much as the theory of the "moral sense" school. Upon this view it would be as absurd that we should try to force our own ideas about the satisfactoriness of moral conduct upon others as it would be for a musical man to insist upon others sitting through a long sonata



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which would produce in them the highly dissatisfying experience of boredom.[1] You cannot account for the fact that the man who condemns occasional drunkenness, no matter how little further harm may result from it, feels himself bound to endeavour to prevent other people indulging in this (to them) satisfactory experience, except by the conviction in his mind that there is an absolute standard of what is satisfactory. And this cannot be unless the part of one's nature which feels the satisfactoriness belongs to the intellect, and not the sensations or the emotions. Doubt-

[1] No doubt it may be contended that the æsthetic judgement, too, is objective: but this is not recognized by those against whom I am arguing, and after all the objectivity of the æsthetic judgement, "This is beautiful," does not make it a duty *for all* to endeavour to enjoy it.



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less the intellectual judgement that an experience is satisfactory to the value-judging intellect is very closely connected with the sensational and emotional experiences which are judged valuable, but the judgement is not the same thing as those experiences themselves. To speak of the value-judgement as a feeling of satisfactoriness misrepresents its true nature except in that popular sense of the word "feeling" in which it is used for any obscure and unanalysed kind of thinking: it is a *thought* satisfactoriness rather than a felt satisfactoriness, even when that which is pronounced satisfactory is most clearly and obviously some feeling or emotion.

The judgement of value is, then, very closely connected (though not identical)



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with satisfactoriness of experience — in two ways. In the first place that which is pronounced good is always an experience which can satisfy. It is always the satisfaction of some desire that is pronounced satisfactory, — the desire of some consciousness, not necessarily that of the person who judges, but of some consciousness or other, — something which actually satisfies some part of the nature of some one. We may even go so far as to say that *prima facie* the satisfaction of all desire as such will commend itself to our value-judging consciousness as good. If in some cases we do in fact condemn what satisfies another, it is always because it involves the non-satisfaction of some other and higher part of his nature. That which I judge good for him will



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always be something which *might* satisfy some part of his nature. Even if the higher desire is not actually felt, it is always some desire which he *might* feel. I condemn the satisfaction of an impulse toward cruelty — even apart from the claims of the being at whose expense this desire would have to be gratified — because it involves the non-satisfaction of the humaner impulses which the man feels or (as a human being) might feel. I should think it senseless to condemn a similar impulse in a beast of prey : in the beast the satisfaction of such an impulse presents itself to me (in Bishop Butler's words) as "agreable to his nature as a whole." And there is a second way in which the idea of value is very closely connected with satisfaction. When I judge some



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end to be good, and therefore the conduct which will produce it to be right, I always do so because the end satisfies a part of my own nature.

So far we may admit an element of truth in the "satisfaction" theory. The point at which we shall differ discloses itself when we go on to ask, What is the part of my nature which finds its satisfaction in the attainment of an objective end — which finds its satisfaction in the preference for myself of the higher desire to the lower, or in the satisfaction of many men's desire in preference to the satisfaction of one? I have already given reasons for holding that, in the case of an act done from a sense of duty, this part of my nature belongs to the intellectual part: but I will try to make the point still clearer. That "higher



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self" or "self as a whole," of which James so often talks as being dissatisfied with the natural self — dissatisfied with what satisfies many other desires or sides of our nature — is, I contend, simply that in me which does other kinds of thinking and which, as a part of that thinking, appraises the various desires and impulses of myself and other men by reference to a certain ideal of human life and conduct as a whole. And this appraisement is no mere expression of any mere liking or disliking, but, as much as any kind of judgement, a piece of insight into the true nature of things, a judgement which (in so far as it is true) must be recognized by every other mind which possesses this insight. It would be possible to quote phrase after phrase from James which



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really recognizes that this is so. It will be enough to mention the constant use of the terms "higher" and "lower"— that admission of an objective standard in our moral judgement which the most emotionalistic of Emotionalists can never prevail upon himself altogether to abandon.

The intellectual character of these value-judgements comes out most clearly in the procedure which a man adopts in comparing the satisfactions of different individuals other than himself. One man desires something — some pleasure, let us say — which would give him some satisfaction, but which will cause non-satisfaction of a similar desire on the part of three other men. Suppose that in a besieged town, when the provisions are limited, one man



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wants to have a full meal at the cost of two other men having no meal at all. Such an arrangement would produce a certain dissatisfaction in most minds; and to avoid that dissatisfaction most of us, if in supreme command in that town, would order the rations to be distributed equally. Of course we might be actuated in so doing by many other considerations besides the desire of dealing fairly between the individuals — by the desire, for instance, that the town should hold out as long as possible. But even if such considerations were absent, it would offend us that such conduct should be permitted. Yet the satisfaction which the commander tries to promote in himself would be simply the satisfaction of a rational demand: and that is only another way of admitting that Reason



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does prescribe the conduct in question. I defy any Emotionalist to point out any impulse, desire, primitive instinct, emotion, sentiment or whatever you call it which runs counter to the unequal distribution except the desire to be rational; and this desire we could not feel unless our reason did judge that there is something irrational about treating one man's desires or pleasures or satisfactions as more important than those of three other (in all relevant ways) similar persons.[1] We have already seen that it is in dealing with the virtue of justice that the anthropological moral-

[1] It might be said that the divider might be influenced by benevolent feelings towards all the persons while he had no reason for preferring one to another: but, however strong his personal affection for one or personal dislike for the other, there would be still the same rational revolt against inequality.



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ists come nearest to admitting that an intellectual concept does influence conduct even in the case of the savage. It is in comparing the relative claims of different individuals that the rational character of our moral judgements is most obvious.

It is only another application of the same principle of justice which compels me to be impartial in dealing with the different moments of the same man's conscious life or experience. That so far as the experience is of equal value, one moment of it is as valuable as any other, and a larger amount more valuable than a smaller is a deduction which will be admitted by all except those who are prepared paradoxically to contend that the element of quantity does not enter at all into our judgement as to the value



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of experience.[1] And this implies the self-evident axiom that the more good is always greater than the less good. Thus the sentiment of justice in its broadest sense is found to involve these two axioms upon which the whole system of such a rationalistic morality as Professor Sidgwick's is built up — the axiom of rational benevolence which pronounces that the greatest good is always to be preferred to the lesser, and the axiom of equity which pronounces that one man's good ought always to be treated as of equal importance with the like good of another.

It is in reference to these two fundamental axioms — the axiom of equity

[1] This has been maintained by some of those who polemize against the idea of a calculus of goods. I have dealt with this matter in my *Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. II, chaps. I and II.



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and the axiom of rational benevolence[1] — that the rational, objective character of our moral judgements can be rendered most evident. It would be consistent with the rationalistic view of ethics to suppose that it was *only* in these quantitative comparisons of good that any rational, and therefore objectively valid, element enters into the moral consciousness, the content of the good being in all cases ascertained by a mere appeal to experienced pleasantness or satisfaction. This is a possible view; but it is one which I do not hold, for the simple reason that I do not ac-

[1] Sidgwick adds a third — the axiom of prudence which asserts that (where one's own good only is in question) one ought to prefer one's own greater good to one's own smaller good; but this is merely a particular case of the axiom which declares that the greater good is always to be preferred to the less.



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tually judge all kinds, whether of pleasure or of satisfaction, to be intrinsically of equal value or to differ only in quantity. I regard — and I find that others regard — one kind of satisfaction as having a higher quality than another; and I claim objective validity for this preference. If the superiority can claim this validity, the judgement which asserts it must be a judgement of Reason. I admit that the rational character of these qualitative judgements is much more difficult to establish than those which relate merely to the just quantitative distribution of satisfactions. It is more difficult in the case of such qualitative judgements as "The pleasure of Art is higher than the pleasure of eating" to dispose satisfactorily of the suggestion that in pronouncing one



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pleasure or other experience intrinsically better than another, I mean merely that I personally find in it more emotional satisfaction of one kind or another than in what I call the lower pleasures or experiences. However, I must try what I can do to show that this is not the case.

Now it is admitted by writers of Professor James's school that we are as a matter of fact more satisfied by one experience than another, though this experience is not necessarily a greater pleasure. What is it, then, that finds it more satisfactory? Is it not clear that in preferring an intellectual satisfaction to a sensual pleasure, I am influenced by a certain ideal as to the relative importance of different parts of my nature —an ideal which appeals to no other



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instinct, emotion, or sentiment except the desire to act in accordance with the ideal? The impulse is one which could not come to a mere animal. It might be replied that the mere animal could not feel the intellectual or æsthetic experience at all, and for that reason could not appreciate its superiority: but the mere experience is a different thing from a consciousness of its superiority. The notion of intrinsic superiority or right to prevail — which is implied in calling the experience "higher" — is something more than an emotion; it is an intellectual concept. And therefore we consider ourselves entitled to act upon our judgement, even in conduct which affects other people, whether or not they actually feel the superiority of the higher experience themselves; which



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would be quite arbitrary if this sense of superiority were a merely subjective preference. We decline to cultivate their taste for drunkenness, no matter how much satisfaction they derive from it. We consider it a duty sometimes to create a supply of education or culture or refined amusement where there is no demand for it. For these reasons I do not myself doubt that this sense of the superiority or superior satisfactoriness of one experience over another is really a rational judgement, and that it is such a judgement that implicitly underlies all that talk about the higher self or the deeper or more permanent satisfaction which we find in writers who seek to identify the good with the satisfactory. All these fine phrases seem to be at bottom simple *aliases* for the *sui gene-*



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*ris* judgement of value which they want to get rid of. The term "satisfaction" does but darken counsel. Either it means at bottom merely pleasantness, or it means a satisfactoriness of so unique and distinct a kind that it had better be expressed by a unique and distinctive term. If satisfactory does not mean pleasant, it is a mere synonym for good or valuable, and the less ambiguous term is the preferable one. The truth at the bottom of the "satisfaction" theory is that the good actually does consist in experiences which are satisfactory to some part of our nature; but in calling them good we mean more than that they are satisfactory; and the rank and importance of different kinds of satisfactoriness — kinds which appeal to different parts of our nature — is



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determined by no sort of satisfaction except the satisfaction of an ideal as to what human nature and human life ought to be. This notion of what ought to be, if it is not a chimera, must be of intellectual origin.

Writers like Professor James are very fond of the term "ideal." They admit that the satisfaction aimed at is an ideal satisfaction or the satisfaction of an ideal self. On their avowed premisses an ideal ought to mean simply that which satisfies a desire — a desire for a particular kind of life as a whole, as distinct from the desire of some particular thing or experience. The term may on their premisses signify a demand different from other demands, but it cannot on that account alone be called superior. And yet they constantly admit that they



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themselves recognize it to be superior —and that not in the sense merely that this or that person demands it more. Sometimes they forget themselves so far as to call it an *intrinsic* superiority. But what can "intrinsic" mean except a superiority which is not created by the precise strength of the demand in this or that individual consciousness, but a superiority which objectively belongs to these higher experiences — which is recognized by our judgements, not created by our desires or our whims? If it be only recognized that the satisfactoriness which constitutes the meaning of good is a satisfactoriness to a self which has a peculiar capacity for judging or valuing ideals, and if the ideals be treated as ideals which are capable of being true or false, there would be no



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harm in such language. Only it will have no superiority over the old commonplace rationalistic doctrine that the good is that which is pronounced such by a particular and distinctive activity of that same Reason or rational Self from which all ultimate concepts or categories of thought are derived.

Before I conclude, I should like briefly to glance at one or two of the consequences or corollaries of a recognition of that rational objective character which I have claimed for our ethical judgements. The first and most important is one on which I have already dwelt; but in view of the ultimately practical purpose of the West lectures, you will excuse me, if I for a moment



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insist upon it once again that it gives us a ground for inferring that, if there is such a thing as a world-purpose, that purpose must be good; and that, if that purpose is the purpose of a self-conscious, rational Will, that Will must be thought of as directed to the good, and therefore as being itself good or righteous. There is no ground for any such assumption except what is derived from our own judgements of value recognized as possessing objective validity. The mere fact that the Universe seems to be tending toward, even consciously tending toward and striving after a certain end, will not prove that end to be good. If our moral judgements are reduced to mere individual "demands" — the demands of our sensitive or emotional nature — there is no



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reason to assume that the Universe is likely to fulfil our demands or to gratify our desires and aspirations. Even if we have arrived on other grounds at something like a personal conception of God, it would be rash to assume that his emotions or desires are like ours. Only if we regard moral approbation as a rational judgement about what ought to be, have we a right to assume that the Mind from which our minds are derived will recognize their truth, and act upon it. Thus and thus only have we a ground for inferring that there is being realized by the world's history an end or good which Reason must pronounce to be the best that is possible. And only upon this supposition have we any rational ground for accepting whatever postulates or consequences



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seem to be implied in this view of the Universe. The mere fact that some men wish for Immortality would be a poor ground for believing in it or even hoping for it. The fact that it seems a necessary postulate of our regarding the world as one which a supremely rational Being could will is a ground for assuming it than which none could be stronger. To put all this in more popular language, the belief in the objectivity of our moral judgements is a necessary premiss for any valid argument for the belief either in God, if by that be understood a morally good or perfect Being, or in Immortality.

The other consequence which I will notice is the bearing of this belief in ethical objectivity upon the problem of moral education. There are many peo-



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ple in England who would like to substitute systematic ethical instruction in schools for the teaching of religion. And in this country, I imagine, the plan of giving such instruction in entire disconnection from theology or religion is much more frequently advocated and adopted. I do not doubt that it is possible to teach both the idea of duty in general and particular duties in detail without explicit reference to theology; and, where there are insuperable obstacles to religious teaching in schools, it may be very desirable that something of the kind should be attempted, though I strongly believe that moral ideas can be taught much better with a religious background and in a religious setting than without them. But I should be more inclined to favour purely eth-



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ical teaching in schools if I were quite sure as to what sort of morality it is that is to be taught. It is a mere delusion to suppose that, while men differ about theology, there are no differences of opinion about morality. On the contrary, I believe that there are differences of ethical opinion which already divide men, and will probably divide them still more sharply in the future, even more fundamentally than any purely theological difference: and the greatest of such differences is the difference between those who do and those who do not believe in the objective validity of the idea of duty. Some of those who clamour for the teaching of morality in schools clearly do not believe in morality at all in the sense in which the ethical Rationalist understands morality.



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In a specimen ethical lesson put forth as an illustration of the value and efficiency of purely moral instruction there occur this question and answer: "If you resist a temptation to tell a lie, what will you get by it for yourself? Answer: "I shall get the respect of my fellows." Such ethical teaching (apart from the fact that the statement is by no means always true) seems to me a good deal more demoralizing than the crudest form of the old-fashioned heaven-and-hell theological morality. Even when an excessive emphasis is laid in religious teaching upon future rewards and punishments rather materialistically understood, these rewards and punishments are always supposed to be inflicted by an intrinsically just and righteous God: and therefore such



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teaching does impress upon the children's minds the idea of an eternal, intrinsic, objective difference between good and evil. It inculcates respect for an absolute moral standard which is independent of human fashion or caprice. In short, it implants and fosters the idea of duty; whereas the teaching which puts the desire for the respect of one's fellows in the forefront of ethical motives tends to make morality mean "Always shout with the largest crowd," to make a god of public opinion, to make a heaven of mere popularity, and to encourage the shrinking from unpopularity as the worst of hells. From such a standpoint Socrates and one greater than Socrates were simply foolish and immoral persons. And yet, if the emotionalist theory of morals which



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I have been examining be well founded, there is no really solid basis for any other kind of ethical teaching.

The theories which I have been discussing are grave scientific theories which must be discussed on scientific grounds without any appeal to mere conservative prejudice. I have tried to suggest to you that they can be met in as purely a scientific and dispassionate way as that in which they are (at least sometimes) defended. But the scientific spirit does not require us to blind ourselves to the practical consequences which hang upon the solution of not a few scientific problems. And assuredly there is no scientific problem upon which so much depends as upon the answer we give to the question whether the distinction which we are accustomed to



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draw between right and wrong belongs to the region of objective truth like the laws of mathematics and of physical science, or whether it is based upon an actual emotional constitution of individual human beings, which may once have possessed, and may possibly still possess, a certain survival-value in the evolution of the species to which those individuals belong. The emotionalist theory of ethics however little intended to have that result by its supporters, is fatal to the deepest spiritual convictions and to the highest spiritual aspirations of the human race.

THE END

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Is Conscience an Emotion?



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